WWII

★ **DEATH FACTORY:** ALL EUROPEAN JEWS FACED EXTERMINATION ★

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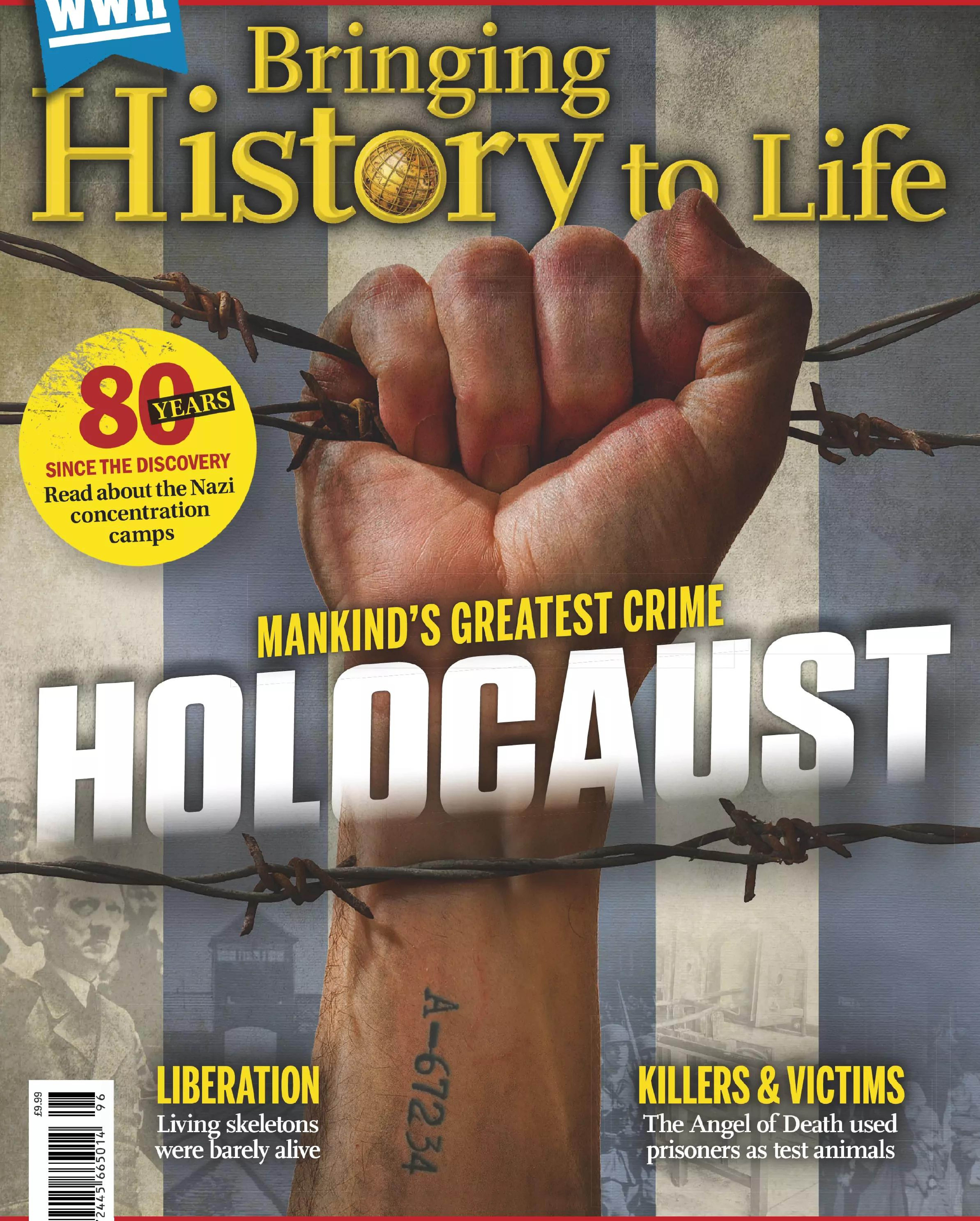

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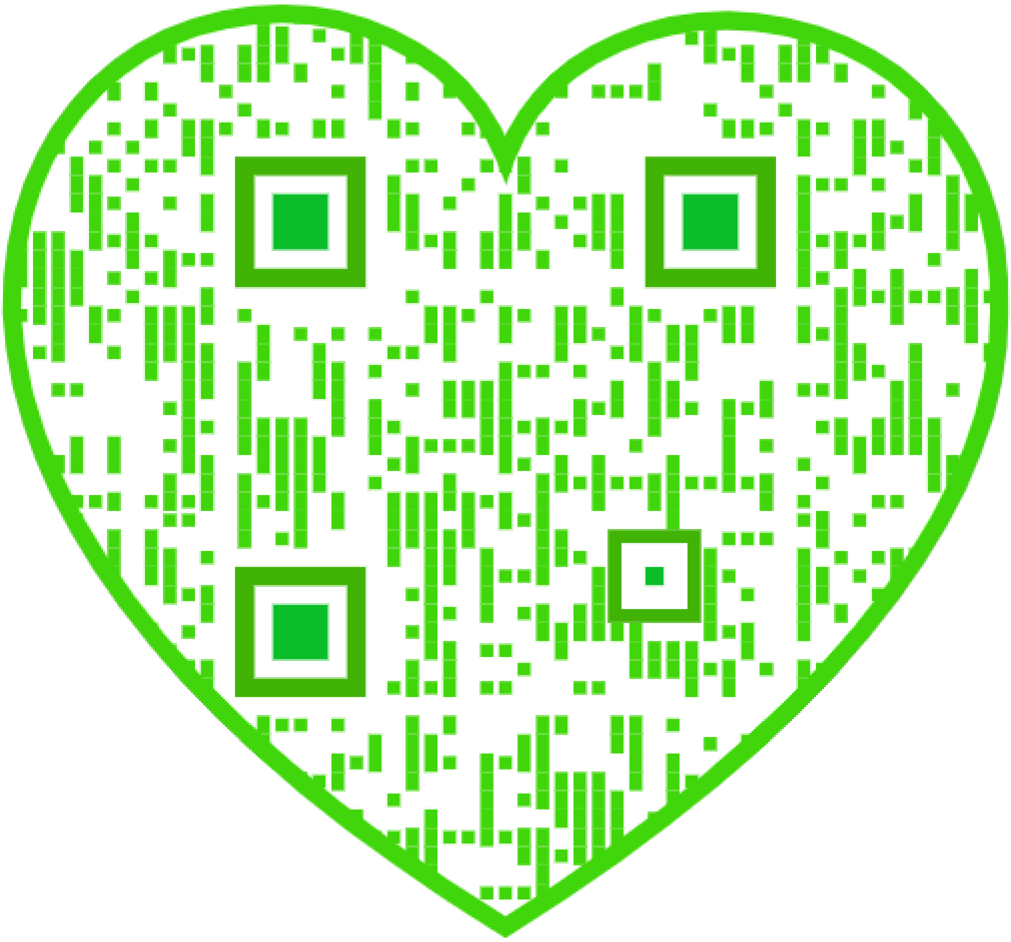
★ JEW-HATRED LED TO HOLOCAUST ★ PRISONERS ROSE AGAINST EXECUTIONERS ★



THE CRIME WE MUST NEVER FORGET

The Soviet soldiers couldn't believe their eyes when they reached Auschwitz. Neither could US and British troops take in the horrors that met them behind the barbed wire in concentration camps across Germany.

Even today, the Holocaust seems like an unreal event. But there is no doubt it happened. Eighty years ago, the veil was lifted on the crimes of the Nazis. In Auschwitz, liberated on 27th January 1945, thousands of surviving prisoners spoke of the hell on earth that the camp had been. Elsewhere, piles of corpses, bones and ashes spoke their own clear language. In total, around six million Jews were killed. People with disabilities, homosexuals and the Roma were also victims of the Nazi extermination strategy.

The stories here are about the Holocaust. We retell the accounts of the most barbaric executioners and the most notorious concentration camps. But most importantly, readers will experience the fate of many who fell victim to the Nazis' efficient extermination machine. The coming pages are uncomfortable reading and not for the faint of heart. But the stories are important. We owe it to the victims to tell of the atrocities, to never forget the crime in all its horror – and together ensure that it will never be repeated.

We will remember.

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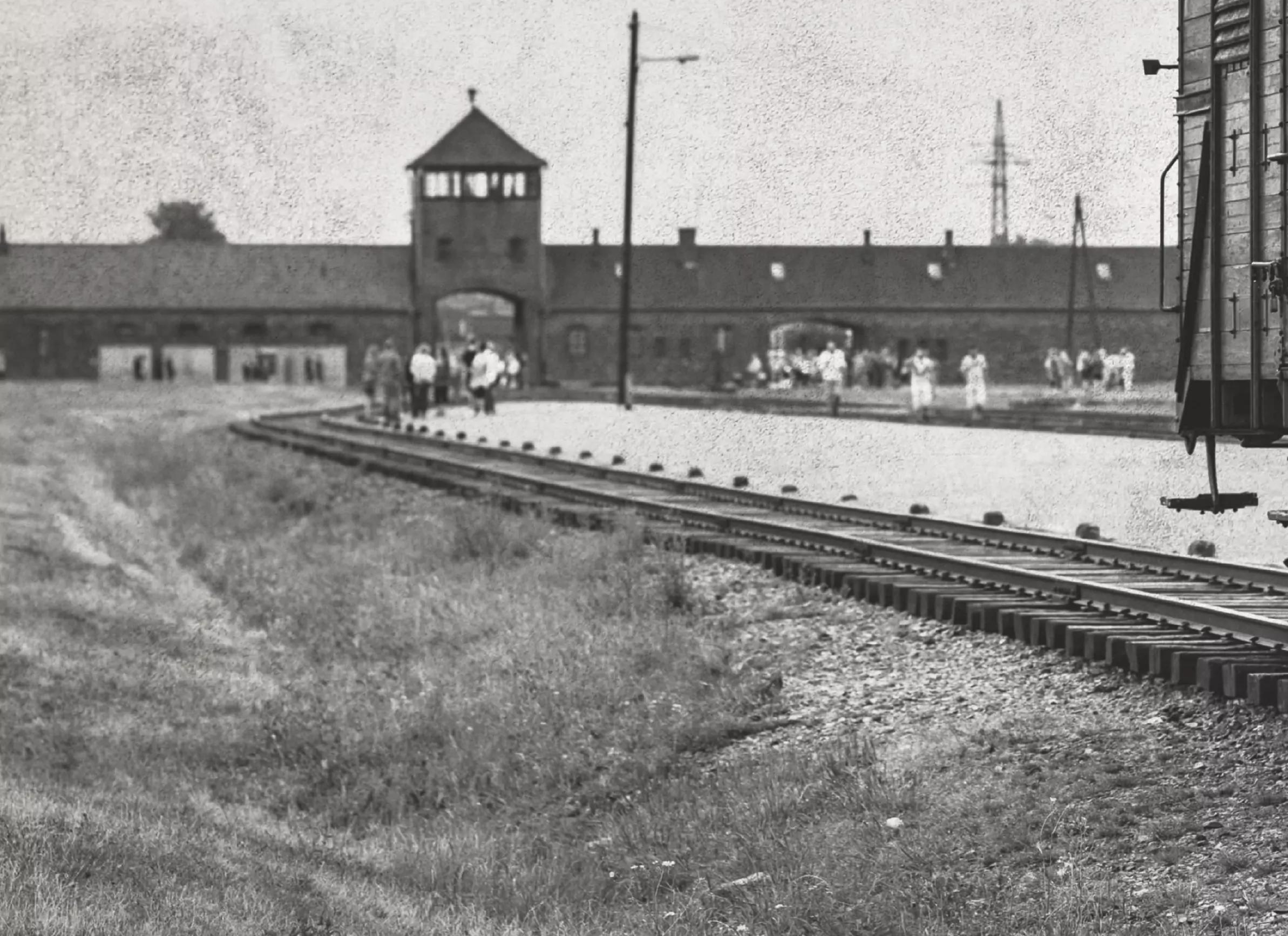
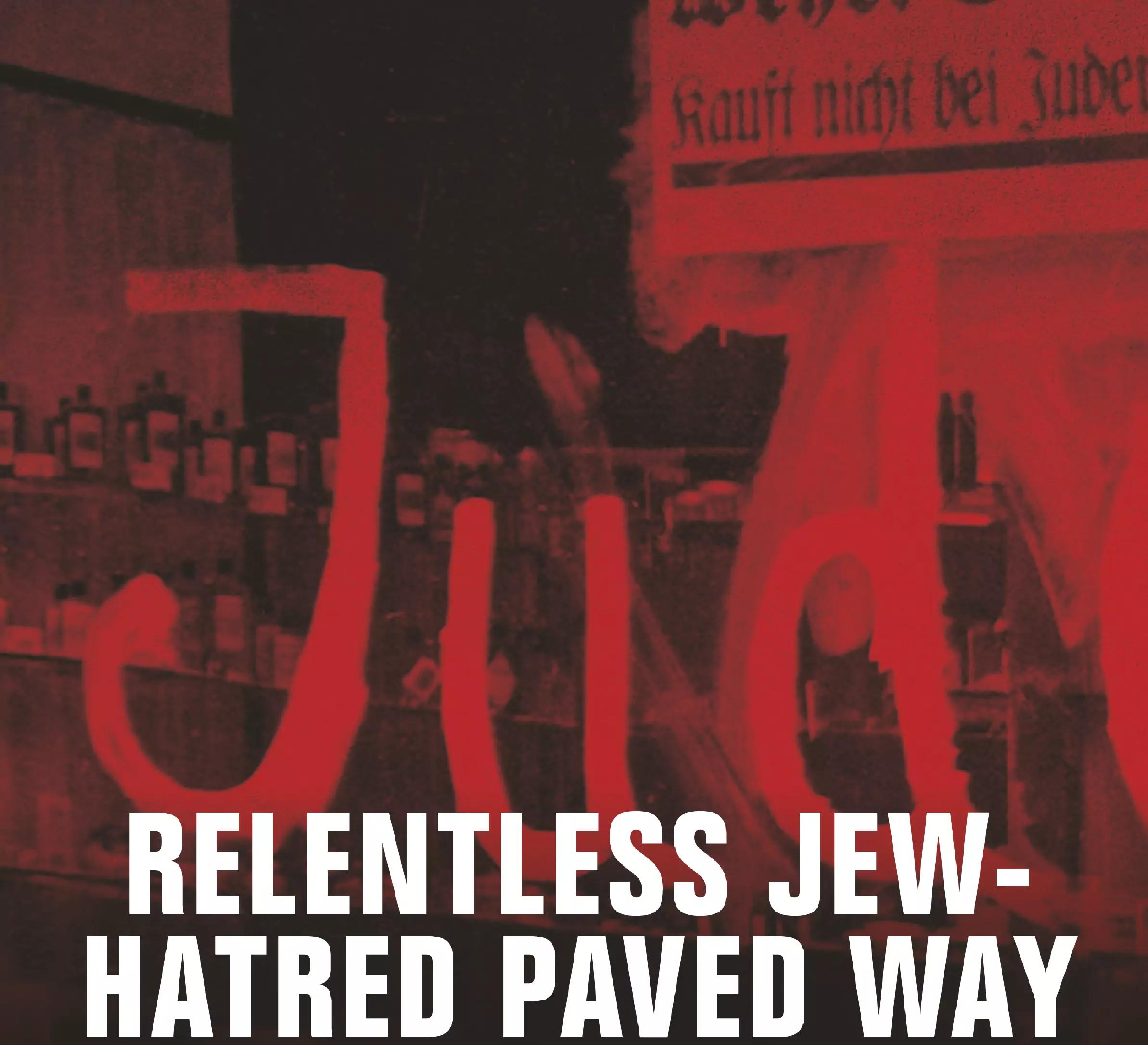


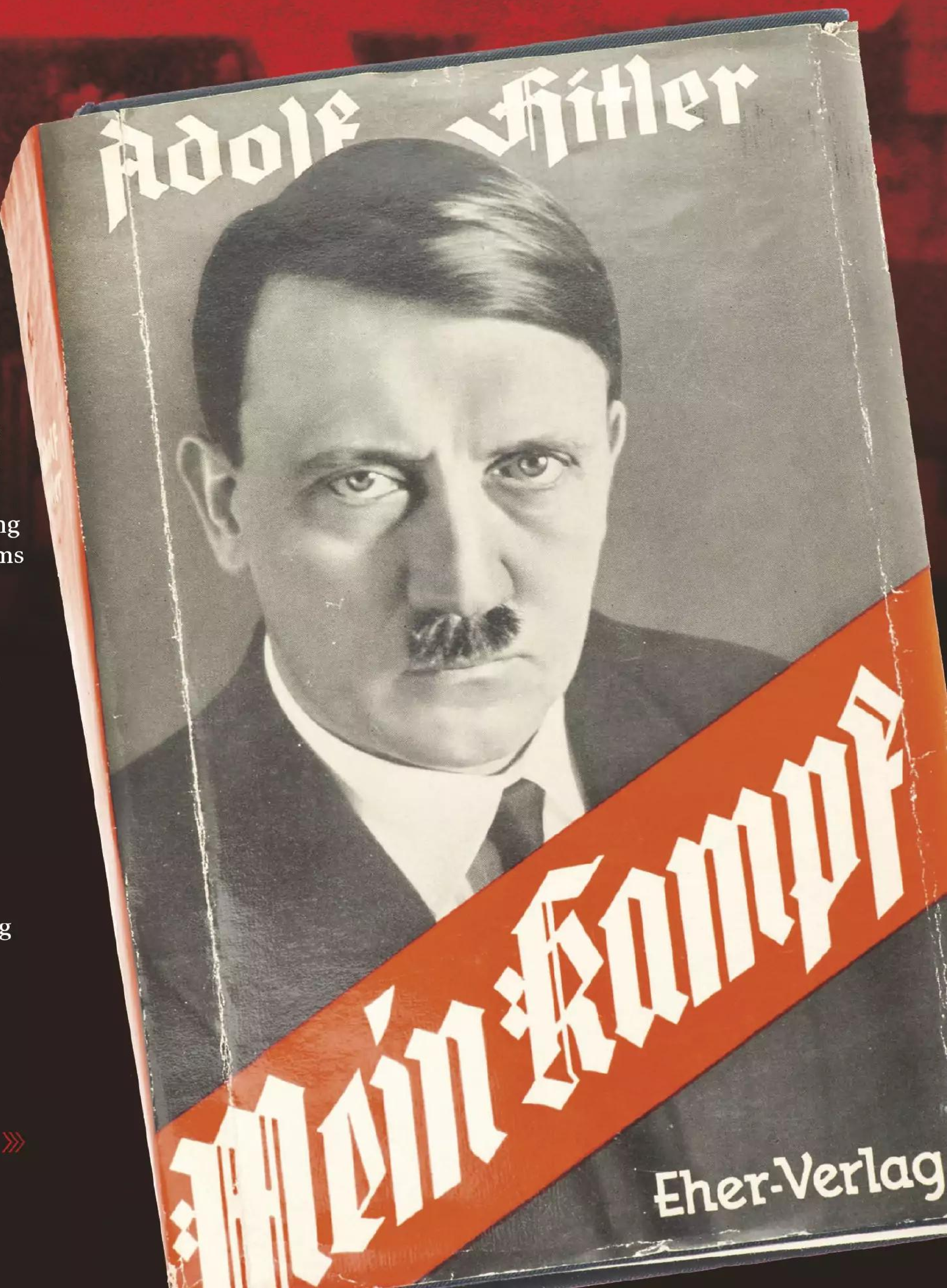


RELENTLESS JEW-HATRED PAVED WAY FOR THE HOLOCAUST

Adolf Hitler saw Jews as parasites who threatened German purity and worked in secret to achieve world domination. But he was far from alone in his feelings. Anti-Semitism was widespread in Europe, and the Nazis stoked people's hatred when they came to power in 1933. On Kristallnacht in 1938, it finally boiled over.

By Stine Overbye

The book *Mein Kampf* became a bestseller in Germany after Hitler came to power in 1933.
ALAMY/IMAGESELECT



Adolf Hitler marched straight through the packed room, took the podium and fired his pistol at the ceiling. “The national revolution has begun!” he yelled. By the following morning, however, the Nazi party leader’s dreams of power had been all but shattered.

On this evening, 8th November 1923, Hitler, accompanied by a crowd of senior Nazis and hundreds of armed SA troops, had stormed into the Bürgerbräukeller beer cellar in Munich, where a number of Bavaria’s most prominent politicians were present. The Austrian had only one goal in mind: to overthrow the state.

However, Hitler and his followers had miscalculated. The coup plotters failed to gain control of the police or the army, and they also failed to secure popular support. By the morning of 9th November, it was clear that the Beer Hall Putsch had ended in a whimper.

The cost was high: 16 Nazis and three police officers were killed in a firefight with the police, the Nazi Party was outlawed and after a trial, Hitler was sentenced to five years in prison for high treason. Hitler spent his time behind bars » writing his half autobiographical and half ideological manifesto *Mein Kampf,* a book that clearly laid out the Nazi Party's agenda: the Jews must be forced out of Germany.

"The black-haired Jewish youth lies in wait for hours on end, satanically glaring at and spying on the unsuspicious girl whom he plans to seduce, adulterating her blood and removing her from the bosom of her own people," he wrote.

MARX MEMORIAL LIBRARY/MARY EVANS/RITZAU SCANPIX

Joseph Goebbels spread anti-Semitic propaganda to the German populace.

According to the Nazi leader, the Jews were secretly working to gain dominion over the world, and he scapegoated them for Germany's painful defeat in World War I. In the manifesto, Hitler stated that the Aryans – the purest, most intelligent and strongest race – risked extinction if they mixed with the lowly Jewish race, which in his eyes was the root of all evil.

With *Mein Kampf,* Hitler hoped to position himself as the natural leader of the far right when he was released. The strategy worked; the Bavarian government pardoned him in December 1924, and in February 1925, the NSDAP (Nazi) Party was allowed to re-emerge with Hitler at its helm – on the condition that the party left its thuggish ways behind and followed a legitimate course.

Hitler was inspired by forgery

The Nazis' hatred of Jews was not an isolated phenomenon; Jews had been persecuted and oppressed in Russia and Europe throughout the ages, and particularly so during the 19th and 20th centuries. The allegations claimed the Jews had become too prominent and held the most important positions in financial and cultural life. This conspiracy theory that Jews were a hostile and sinister people bent on world domination raged among Christian nationalists in many countries.

The theory originated in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an anti-Semitic forgery published in 1903 and widely disseminated worldwide. The *Protocols* were alleged to be the proceedings of an international Jewish conference, but they were probably the work of the Russian security service. It wanted Tsar Nicholas II to intensify the fight against radical Jews in Russia.

According to the *Protocols,* the Jews aspired to world domination and therefore intended to overthrow Christian civilisation through liberalism and socialism.

Although the forgery was exposed in 1921, Hitler insisted that the *Protocols* were genuine. The Nazi leader eagerly used the forged writings in propaganda that would eventually pave the way for the Holocaust.

Jewish shops were boycotted

After the failed Munich coup, Hitler and the Nazi Party changed tactics and tried to seize power through parliamentary means. But it wasn't until Germany was plunged into economic crisis and high unemployment after the Wall Street Crash in October 1929 that Nazi fortunes really took off. Voters flocked to the party and in January 1933, the party seized power with Hitler at the helm.

The country's approximately half a million Jews could now look forward to living under a regime that was officially anti-Semitic. In the first months after Hitler came to power, members of the Nazi Party's stormtroopers, the SA, murdered around 40 Jews in terrorist attacks in the provincial towns of Niederstetten and Creglingen in south-west Germany.

> "Do I need to tell you the race of the dirty swine who perpetrated this foul deed? A Jew!"
>
> JOSEPH GOEBBELS
> BEFORE KRISTALLNACHT

The attacks sparked sharp criticism from abroad, including the US and the UK, where politicians, businessmen, church leaders and Jewish organisations discussed the possibility of boycotting

JEWS HAVE BEEN SCAPEGOATS FOR MILLENNIA

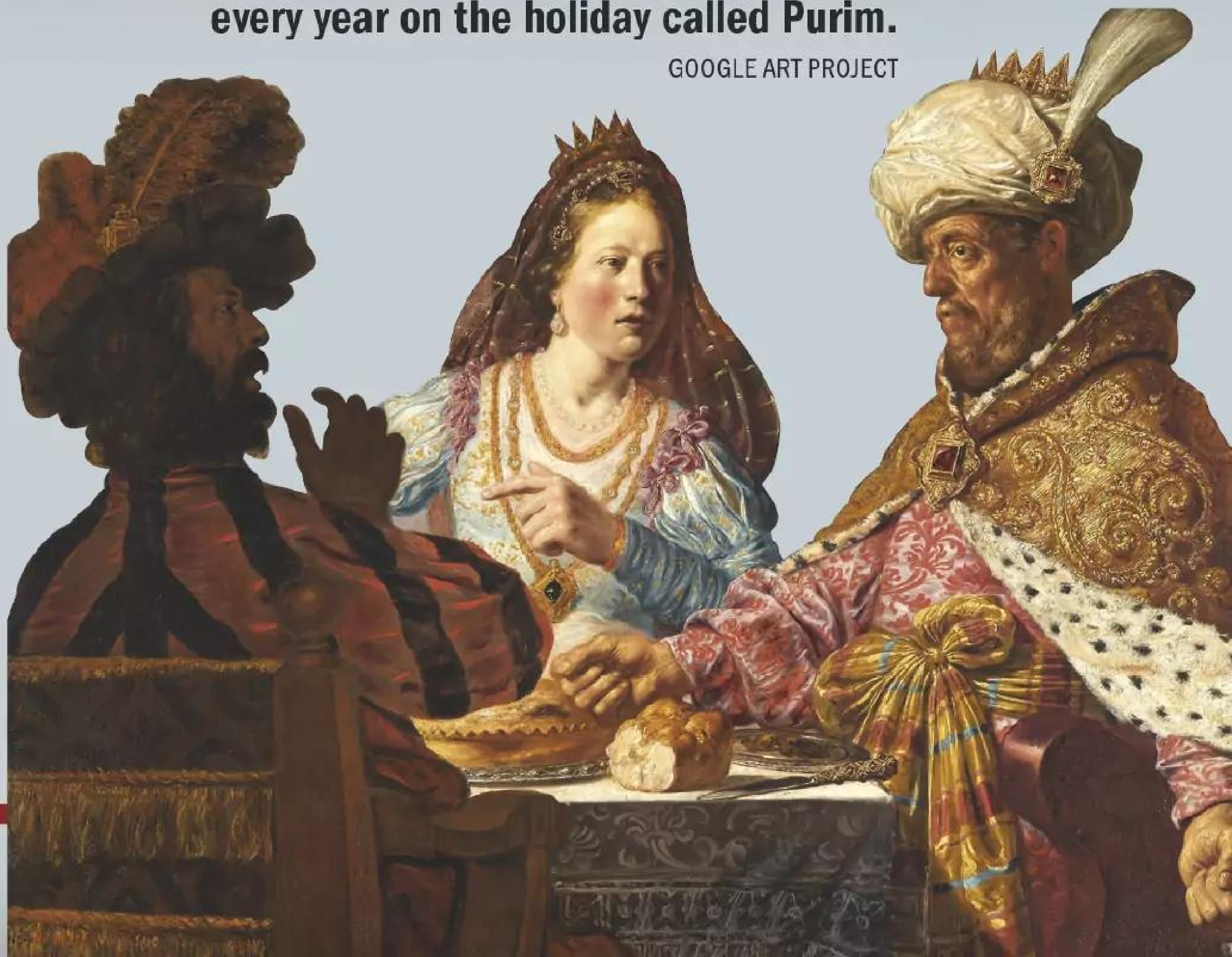
Jew-hatred was not a Nazi invention. Jews have been accused time and time again of being responsible for disasters such as plagues.

5th century BC
Queen thwarted massacre of the Jews

The Book of Esther in the Bible tells the story of a planned Jewish massacre in Persia in the 470s BC. The Persian king Xerxes was married to Esther, a Jew, but his minister Haman had taken a dislike to Esther's uncle Mordecai. Haman ordered his officials to exterminate the Jews and confiscate their possessions. However, Esther revealed Haman's cruel plans and King Xerxes responded by having Haman and his sons murdered.

Jews commemorate the rescue from Haman every year on the holiday called Purim.

GOOGLE ART PROJECT



German goods, but the Nazis viewed this response as pure incitement.

Enraged, Hitler retaliated by launching the first collective action against Germany's Jews on 1st April 1933. The Judenboykott (Jewish boycott) aimed to discourage other countries from expressing negative opinions about conditions in Germany. If criticism continued, Hitler warned, then the Germans would only escalate their anti-Semitism.

The Nazis painted slogans such as "Don't buy from Jews!" and "The Jews are our misfortune!" on shop windows and on posters outside all Jewish shops, law firms and doctors' surgeries. SA guards in brown uniforms stood menacingly in front of Jewish businesses.

The action was just a precursor of the hateful actions the Jews would be subjected to. Week by week and month by month, Hitler and his regime tightened their grip on German Jews and introduced a series of new laws and measures. On 10th May 1933, students stormed Berlin University and the city's libraries and bookshops, ripping books off the shelves. Trucks carried thousands of writings by Jewish and so-called degenerate authors such as Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx and Ernest Hemingway to Opernplatz in the centre of Berlin. As darkness fell, SA members lit a gigantic bonfire, where around 25,000 books went up in flames.

The regime also introduced new licensing requirements for doctors and dentists. They meant non-Aryans could no longer obtain a licence, nor would they be allowed to work in the cultural sector as actors or artists, among other prohibitions. During 1934, Jews were also banned from qualifying as lawyers or pharmacists.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

As early as 1933, books by Jewish and "degenerate" authors were burned on large bonfires across Germany. A writer was considered degenerate if he challenged Nazi ideas.

Jew-hatred became law

After two years in power, Germany's dictator and his Nazi Party had achieved absolute power. In September 1935, at the party's annual convention in Nuremberg, Hitler presented two new racial laws to protect the German Reich from the perceived Jewish threat, paving the way for the Aryan Greater Germany that the Führer dreamed of. "A legislative solution to the problem" was how Hitler framed it from the rostrum.

When the speech was over, the hall erupted in cheers. On 15th September 1935, the assembly passed what would later become known as the Nuremberg Laws. From now on, a German citizen had to be either of German or "related" blood. All Jews in Germany lost their citizenship, and at the same time the laws forbade marriage and sexual relations between Jews and Germans to ensure the "purity of German blood". Jews were denied access to education, theatres, cinemas, libraries, public transport and parks, and Jewish children were expelled from schools.

Killing triggered orgy of violence

With these racial laws, the Nazis froze Jews out of society, although they

»

168 BC

Syrian king banned Judaism

Syrian King Antiochus IV Epiphanes outlawed Judaism and desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem in history's first serious conflict with anti-Semitic undertones. The king's intention was to crush the Jews and impose Greek culture on the region by force, but the Jews fought back: after three years of fighting, they managed to retake the Temple in Jerusalem.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the temple.

AD 38

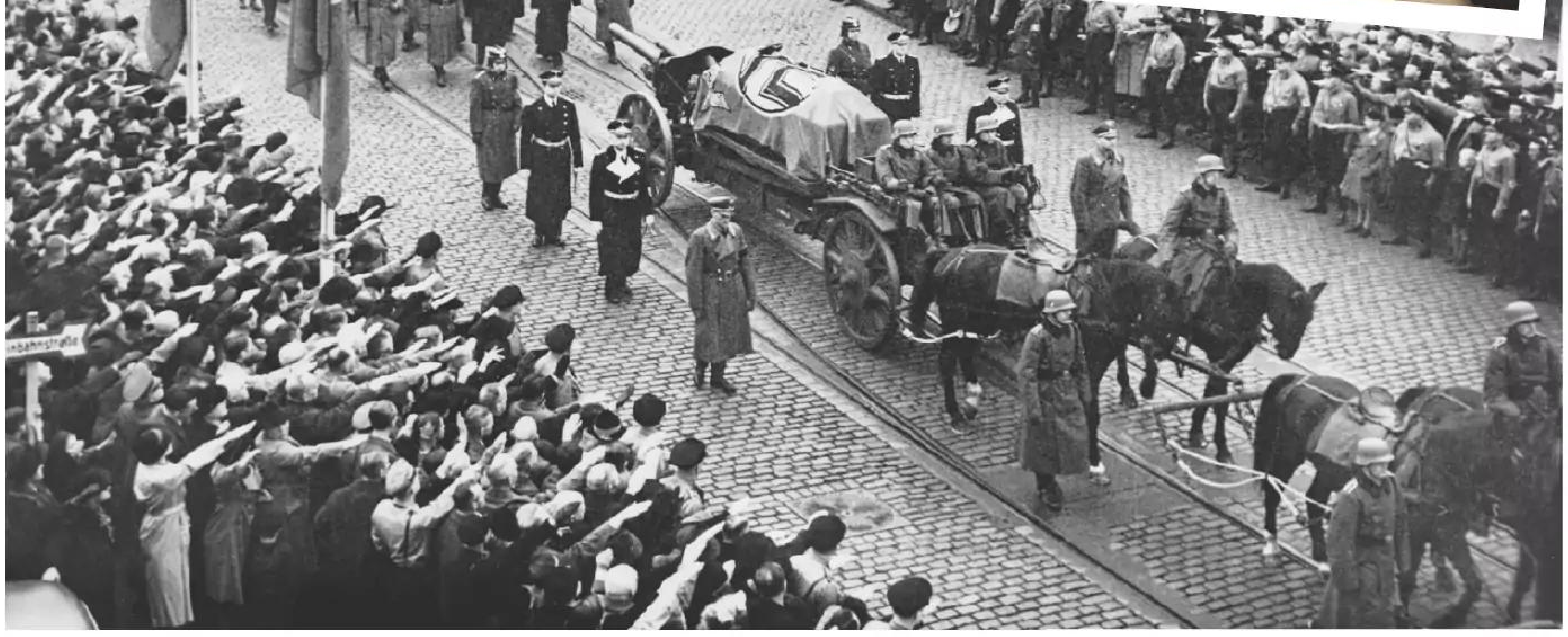
Emperor's statue triggered massacre

Under the Roman Emperor Caligula, a bloody attack on Jews broke out in Alexandria, Egypt, which had almost 200,000 Jewish inhabitants. Because the Jews would not recognise Caligula as a god, he unleashed a huge massacre: synagogues and Jewish homes were burned, and an unknown number of Jews were killed.

132-135

Romans crushed Jewish revolt

The Roman Emperor Hadrian's ban on Jewish customs such as the circumcision of male children led to revolt. Led by commander Bar Kochba, the Jews went to war against the Romans and briefly captured Jerusalem. However, Roman supremacy ultimately crushed the revolt, which cost the lives of around half a million Jews.



EVERETT HISTORICAL / SHUTTERSTOCK

Funeral procession for German diplomat Ernst vom Rath in Düsseldorf. The Nazis used vom Rath's murder as an excuse for Kristallnacht and their escalated persecution of Jews.

Herschel Grynszpan, only 17 years old, shot Ernst vom Rath five times in the stomach with a pistol.

SCHERL/SUEDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG PHOTO/RITZAU SCANPIX

could still lead a fairly tolerable life. In the autumn of 1938, however, the situation deteriorated even further.

The Gestapo now began deporting thousands of Jews to a no-man's land between Germany and Poland. Among the exiles was the family of 17-year-old Herschel Grynszpan. His parents had been forcibly relocated from their home in Hanover, Germany, to a poor area near the Polish border.

Herschel himself was living illegally with an uncle in Paris, and his thoughts kept turning to the family's unfortunate fate. Eventually, a cocktail of anger, grief and a thirst for revenge compelled him to act; on 7th November 1938, the teenager travelled to the German embassy in Paris, tricked his way into the building and shot a junior German diplomat with a revolver.

Initially, 29-year-old embassy secretary Ernst vom Rath survived the attack, but he was left in a critical condition. The following morning, all hell broke loose: German newspapers labelled the entire Jewish population as murderers plotting a bloody battle with the Nazis. As the day wore on, spontaneous demonstrations and acts of retribution erupted across Germany. In Bad Hersfeld in the state of Hesse, the Nazis burned down a synagogue, and in many other towns, angry crowds smashed the windows of Jewish-owned shops and painted the facades with slogans like *"Raus mit den Juden"* ("Away with the Jews").

On Wednesday 9th November 1938, vom Rath died. The message reached Adolf Hitler that evening, who'd gathered with the rest of the party leadership in Munich to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the beer hall coup. Hitler leant across to Joseph Goebbels: it was time the Jews felt the wrath of the party members. "The SA should be allowed to have a fling," he whispered.

With that line, the Führer left the party without having given his planned speech. Instead, Joseph Goebbels took the floor: "Ernst vom Rath was a good German, a loyal servant of the Reich, working for the good of our people in our embassy in Paris. Shall I tell you what happened to him? He was shot down… He is now dead."

For a few seconds, Goebbels let the message sink in before he banged the table and raised his voice: "Do I need to tell you the race of the dirty swine who perpetrated this foul deed? A Jew! Tonight he lies in jail in Paris, claiming that he acted on his own, that he had no instigators of this awful deed behind him. But we know better, don't we?" Goebbels thundered.

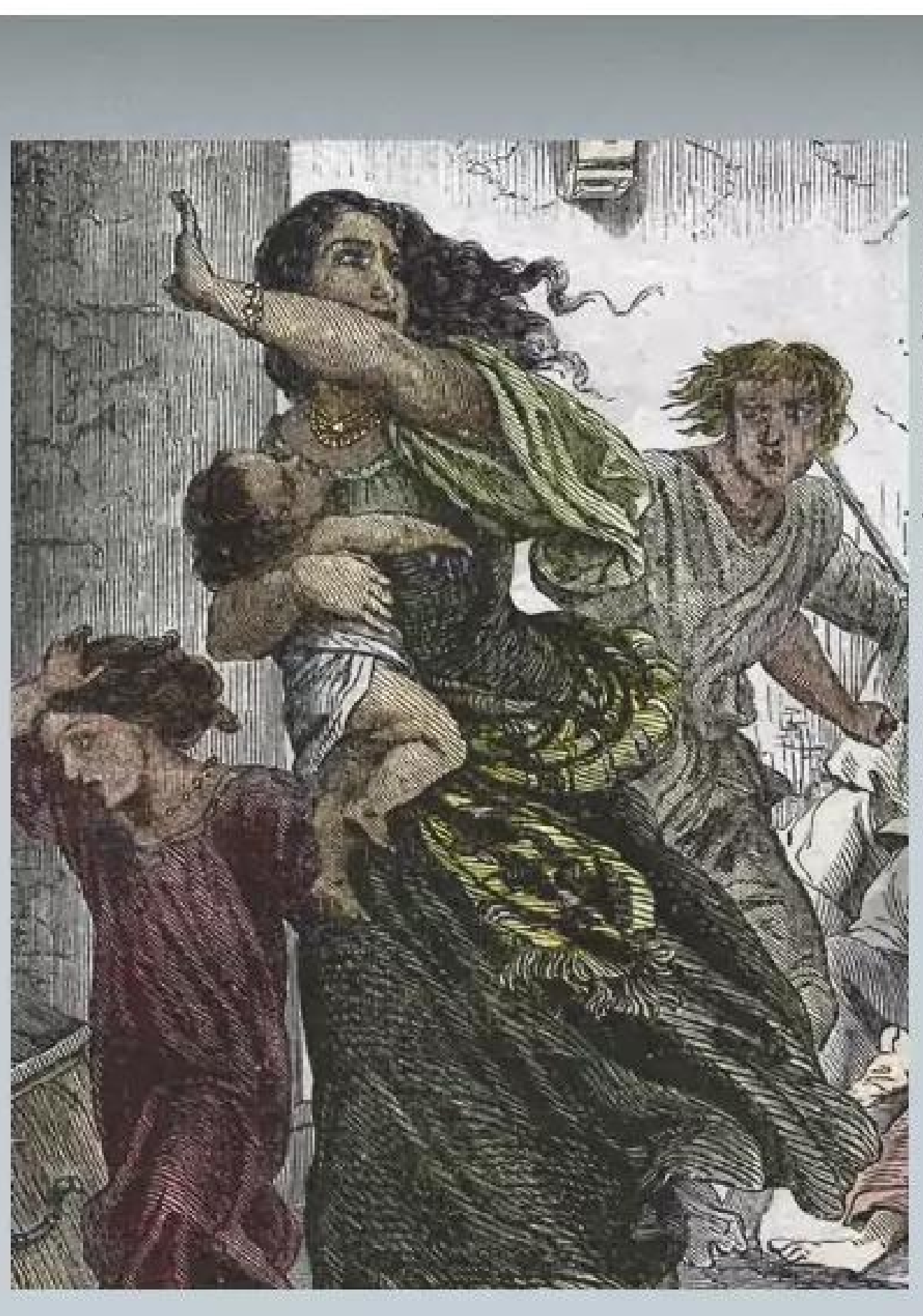
The words of the Reich Minister of Propaganda struck home. Party members screamed for retribution. Goebbels continued: "Comrades, we cannot allow this attack by international Jewry to go unchallenged. It must be repudiated. Our people

»

1096

Christian crusaders attacked Jews

After Pope Urban II called for a crusade against the Muslims in 1095, up to 100,000 European crusaders travelled to the Holy Land to restore Jerusalem and Bethlehem to Christian hands. But the Crusaders didn't just turn their weapons on Muslims in the Middle East – on their way through Western Europe, they attacked several Jewish communities in Germany and France. In the city of Mainz alone, the massacres claimed 1,100 lives in one day.



LEEMAGE/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES

1171

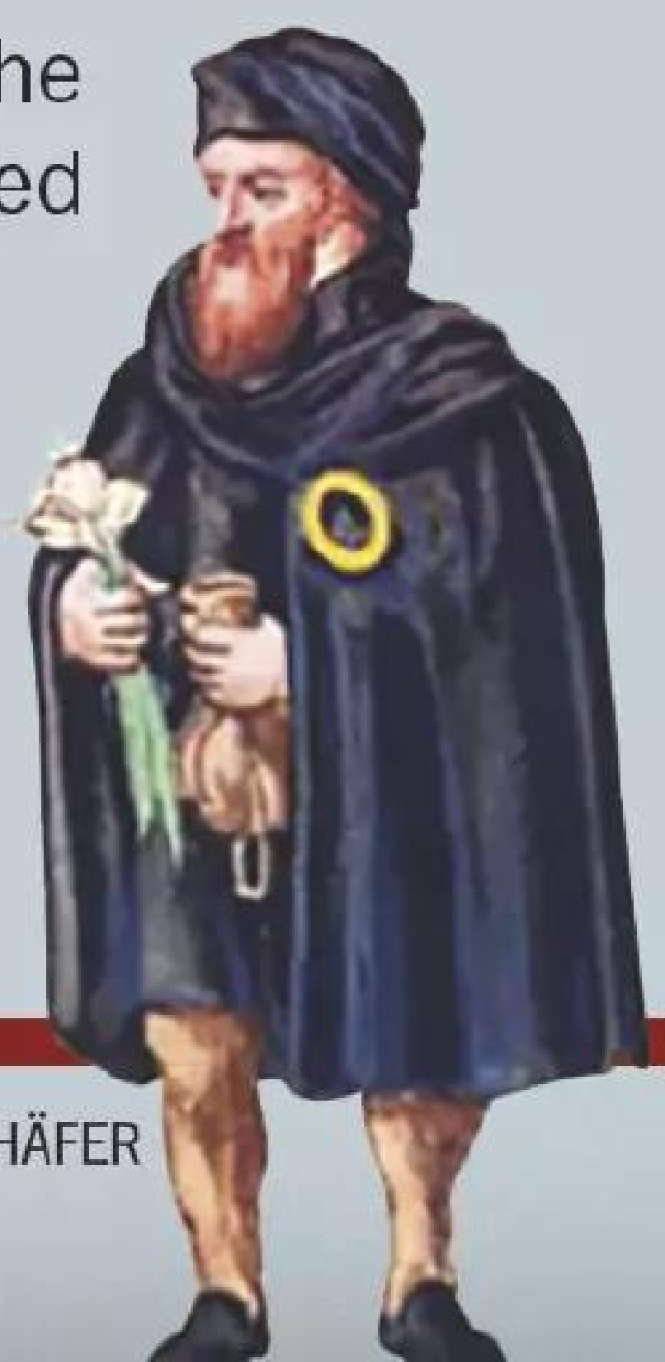
Jews accused of murdering children

In the northern French town of Blois, a stable boy reported seeing the town's rabbi throw a Christian child into the river. As retribution for the alleged crime, 32 Jews were burned at the stake. The notion that Jews murdered Christian children to use their blood in rituals and ceremonies was widespread in the 12th century.

1215

Council forced Jews to wear badge

At the Fourth Council of the Lateran, it was decided that Jews should settle in special neighbourhoods and be forced to wear a Jewish label. The badge's form was not fixed and varied locally. In several places it was supplemented with bells so that Jews could be heard from a distance.



REUTER/SCHÄFER

RACIAL LAWS ‘PROTECTED’ GERMANS FROM JEWISH BLOOD

The Nuremberg Laws divided the population into racial categories based on how much German blood each citizen had in their veins. Strict rules were in place to ensure that Jewish blood did not mix with German. The laws became the foundation for the systematic persecution of Jews that later led to Kristallnacht and the Holocaust.

○ **Full-blooded German** with no Jewish or other ‘unwanted’ blood

◔ **German** with 1/8th Jewish blood

◔ **Quarter-blood** – also called mixed race (second degree)

◑ **Half-blood** – half-Jews or mixed race (first degree)

◕ **Three-quarter blood** (was considered full-blooded)

● **Full-blooded Jew** with only Jewish blood in their veins

Full-blooded German

Four German grandparents meant that one person was a full-blooded German. Marriage and sexual intercourse with Jews or half-Jews were forbidden. However, marriage between full-blooded Germans and quarter Jews was allowed, as their children would only be one-eighth Jewish. Full-blooded Germans could be citizens of the German Reich.

Quarter-blood

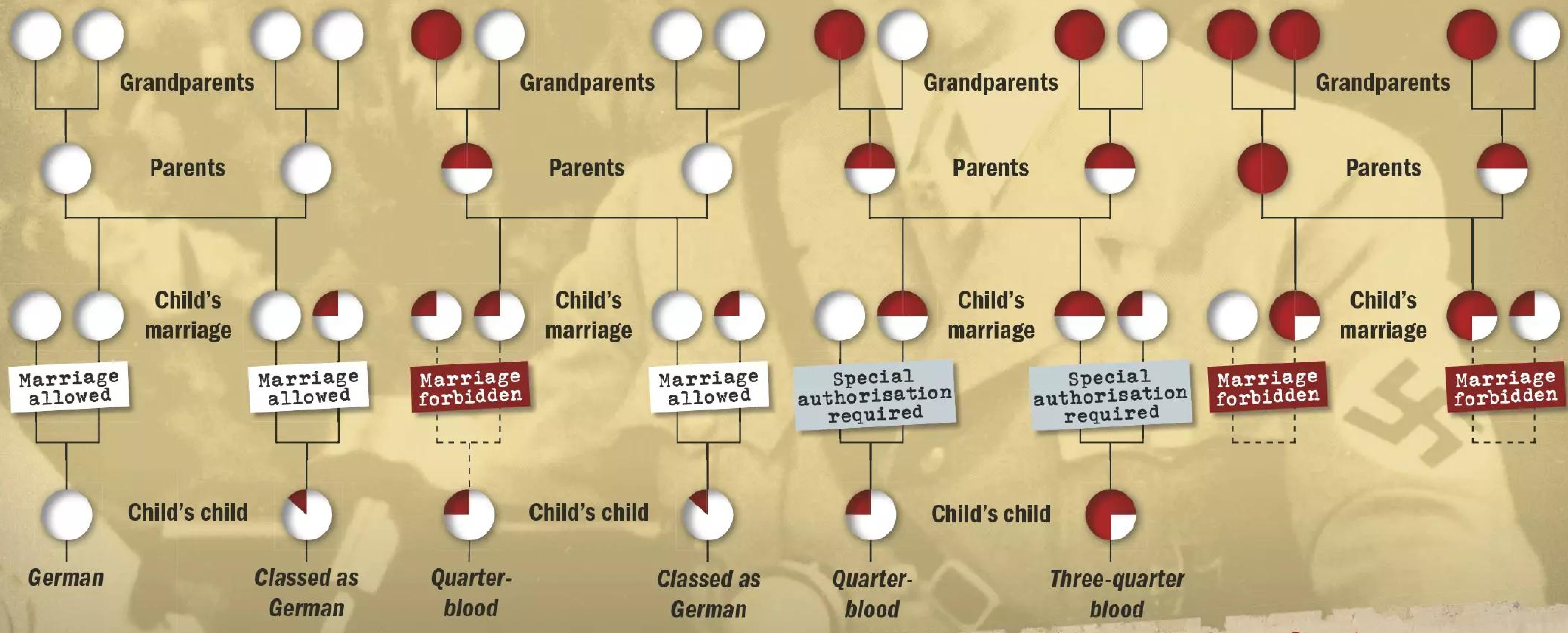
A quarter-blood had only one full-blooded Jew as a grandparent and one half-Jew as a parent. Quarter-bloods had to marry Germans, so that their children would be one-eighth Jewish bloods, who counted as Germans. Marriage with other quarter-bloods was forbidden, because their children, according to Nazi racial theory, would also be considered quarter-bloods, and hence their Jewish blood would not have been diluted. Quarter-blood Jews could be citizens of the Third Reich.

Half-blood

A half-Jew – also known as ‘mixed race (first degree)’ – was a person with two full-blooded Jews as grandparents. Half-Jews had to seek special permission to marry, and in most cases, were only allowed to marry Jews or other half- or three-quarter-bloods.

Full-blooded Jew

Those people with three or four full-blooded Jews as grandparents were considered full-blooded Jews, regardless of religious beliefs. Full-blooded Jews could not marry or have sexual relations with any non-Jews – and vice versa. Jews could not be citizens of the Third Reich. After 1935, Jews without national citizenship could no longer work in the public sector, nor did they have electoral or voting rights.

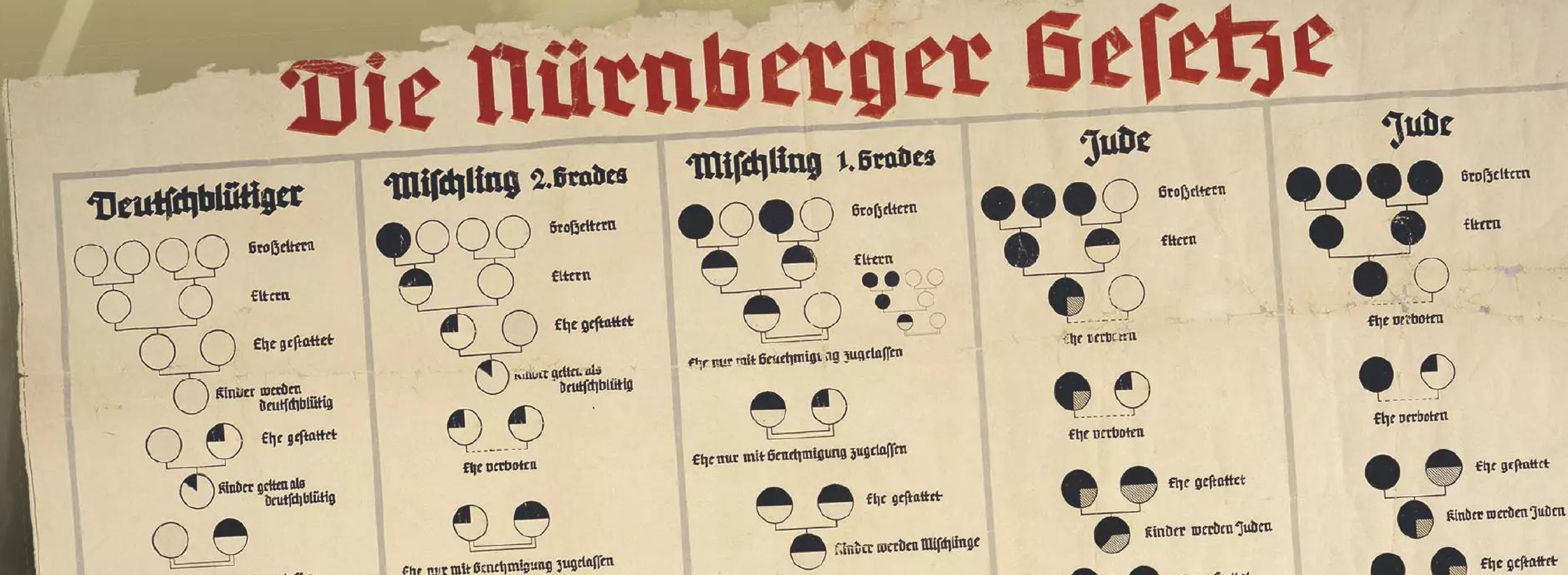


Grandparents
Parents
Child’s marriage
Marriage allowed
Marriage allowed
Child’s child
German
Classed as German

Grandparents
Parents
Child’s marriage
Marriage forbidden
Marriage allowed
Child’s child
Quarter-blood
Classed as German

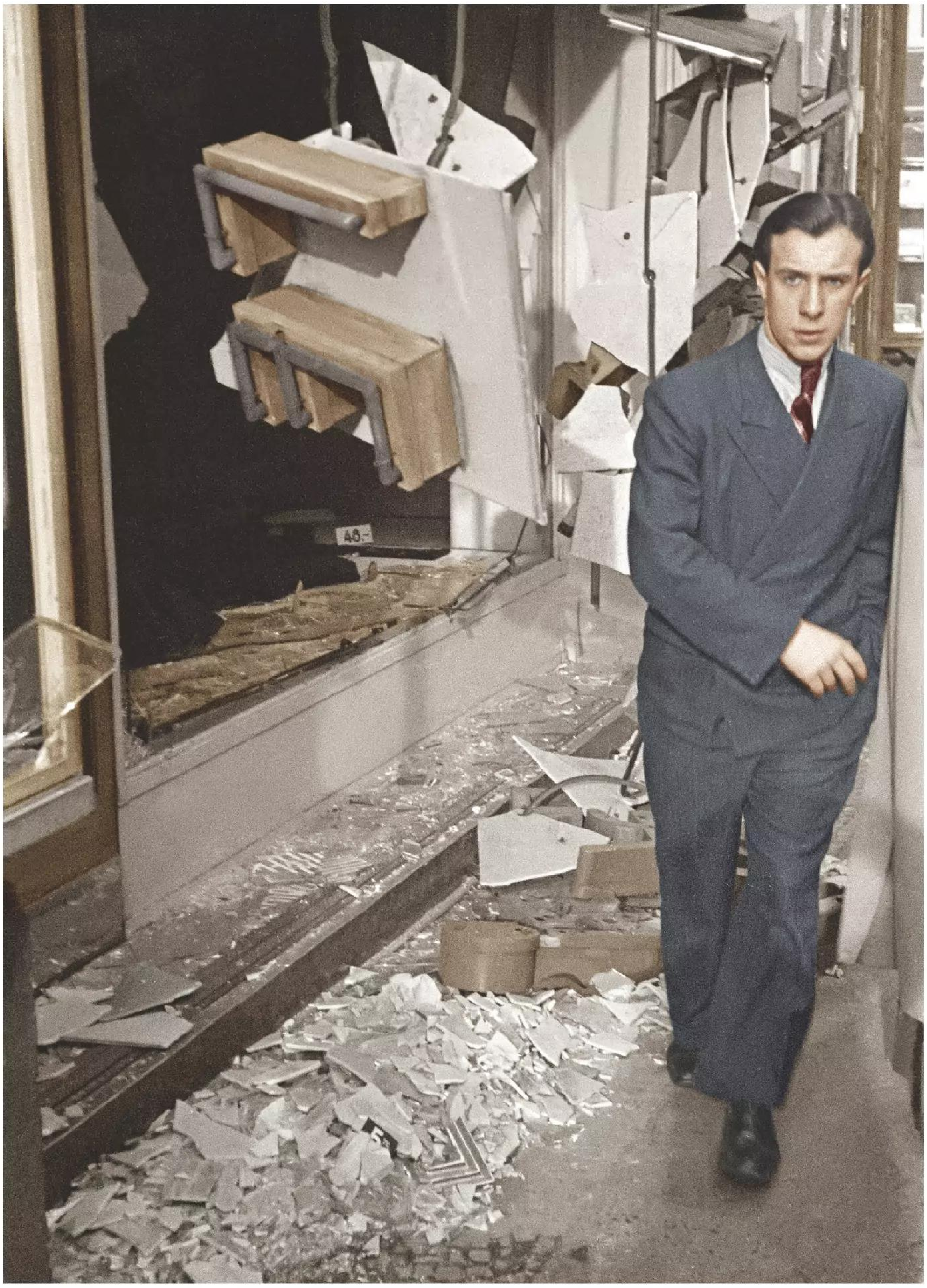
Grandparents
Parents
Child’s marriage
Special authorisation required
Special authorisation required
Child’s child
Quarter-blood
Three-quarter blood

Grandparents
Parents
Child’s marriage
Marriage forbidden
Marriage forbidden


Die Nürnberger Geſetze
Deutſchblütiger
Großeltern
Eltern
Ehe geſtattet
Kinder werden deutſchblütig
Ehe geſtattet
Kinder gelten als deutſchblütig
Miſchling 2. Grades
Großeltern
Eltern
Ehe geſtattet
Kinder gelten als deutſchblütig
Ehe verboten
Ehe nur mit Genehmigung zugelaſſen
Miſchling 1. Grades
Großeltern
Eltern
Ehe nur mit Genehmigung zugelaſſen
Ehe nur mit Genehmigung zugelaſſen
Ehe geſtattet
Kinder werden Miſchlinge
Jude
Großeltern
Eltern
Ehe verboten
Ehe verboten
Ehe geſtattet
Kinder werden Juden
Jude
Großeltern
Eltern
Ehe verboten
Ehe verboten
Ehe geſtattet
Kinder werden Juden
Ehe geſtattet

The Nuremberg Laws stripped Jews of their German citizenship and banned German-Jewish marriages.

AKG/RITZAU SCANPIX



AKG/RITZAU SCANPIX

Kristallnacht got its name from all the broken glass left glittering in the German streets afterwards. In total, almost 7,500 Jewish shops were destroyed by the Nazis.

must be told, and their answer must be ruthless, forthright, salutary!"

Goebbels appealed to party veterans to immediately organise a series of "spontaneous" demonstrations. The meeting's attendees swarmed out of the hall to call their party organisations. Throughout Germany, the phone lines glowed, and from Munich the leaders of the local Nazi branches were instructed to attack synagogues, Jewish shops and homes that evening and into the night.

Vengeful masses went on the attack

At one minute to midnight on 9th November, Munich's fire station received its first alarm call. Protesters had smashed the windows of a Jewish-owned textile store in Augustenstraße and set fire to the goods in the shop window's display.

Three minutes later, another call came in: one of the city's synagogues was engulfed in flames. Five fire engines responded to extinguish the fire. When SA officers discovered the attempt to put out the fire, they cut the fire hoses and poured litres of petrol on to the blaze.

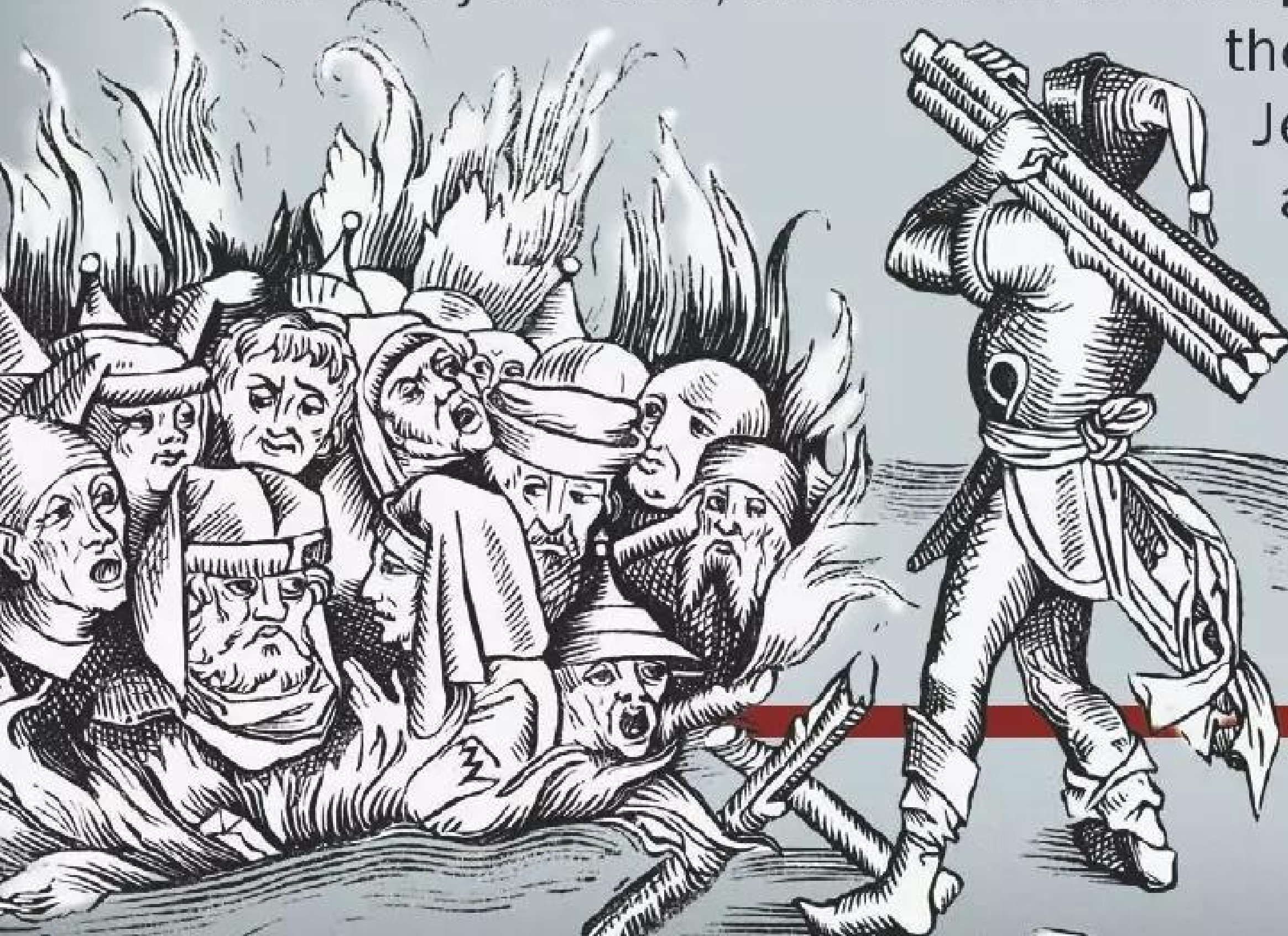
Kristallnacht had begun. Nazis unleashed their hate and rampaged through the night in an orgy of violence, arson and murder that spread to over 1,000 German cities.

SA troops attacked Jews in the street, looted shops, smashed Jewish homes and in extreme cases threw residents out of windows. In northern Bavaria, a Jewish family was woken up in the middle of the night. Two men grabbed the father and murdered him without a word. Another family member was kidnapped and taken to a nearby

1348-1349

Jews were blamed for the Black Death

When the plague swept across Europe, killing up to half of the continent's population, many Christians claimed that the Jews were the culprits. They had poisoned the water in wells, rivers and springs, the rumours said, not considering that Jews, like everyone else, succumbed to the epidemic. As a result of the accusations, 350 Jewish communities across Europe were exterminated – in Strasbourg alone, 2,000 Jews were killed in one day.



GETTY IMAGES

1543

Luther called Jews poisonous snakes

In his treatise *Against the Jews and their Lies*, German theologian Martin Luther described Jews as poisonous snakes and parasites who harboured hatred towards all Christians. He called for setting fire to Jewish houses and burning their synagogues. The Jews themselves, according to Luther, should be put to forced labour or forced to emigrate.

1648

Cossacks massacred 100,000 Jews

Led by rebel leader Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Cossacks killed around 100,000 Jewish people. The Cossacks had risen in an uprising against Polish rule and believed the Jews represented their Polish oppressors. Jews had their intestines pulled out, others were dismembered and beheaded, and some were even roasted over fire and eaten.

forest. There he was tied to a tree and used as target practice.

Persecutions in the capital Berlin were the most organised; police set up roadblocks to direct traffic around the areas where the mob was to be unleashed. They then blocked off Jewish buildings, cut the telephone lines and switched off the electricity. By dawn, nine of the city's 12 synagogues had been burned – in one, the caretaker and his family perished in the flames.

In the spa town of Baden-Baden, police arrested the town's Jewish men – around 80 in total – and took them to the police station, where they were fitted with large Stars of David and then forced through the streets, where they were showered with hateful shouts from bystanders. When the crowd reached the town's synagogue, SS guards herded them inside with punches and kicks, where the Jews were ordered to sing Nazi anthems and recite excerpts about the devious nature of the Jews from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Later, the Nazis drove the Jews out and set fire to the synagogue. As the flames raged, the Germans forced their prisoners into a stationary bus to transport them to the dreaded Dachau concentration camp. Around 30,000 other Jewish men suffered the same fate in those November days as they were all transported to the nearest concentration camp.

Jews fled in panic

During Kristallnacht, around 7,500 Jewish-owned businesses and homes were smashed, while 267 synagogues were destroyed or burned – many to the ground. According to official figures, the violence cost 91 Jews their lives, but in fact thousands more perished, some in prison camps over the next few months. Up to 300 Jewish women committed suicide after losing their homes or husbands.

After Kristallnacht, Jews had to pay to remove the broken glass from the streets and clear the burned sites where the synagogues had stood. On top of this, the German Nazi government fined the Jewish communities a total of one billion Reichsmark.

The only Nazis convicted of the Kristallnacht orgy of violence were the men who had raped Jewish women. By raping them, they had violated the Nuremberg Laws, which prohibited sexual relations between German citizens and non-Aryans.

For Germany's Jews, Kristallnacht marked a crucial turning point; almost six years of provocation and discrimination had been replaced by a new phase of brutal abuse and murder. In the wake of the Kristallnacht nightmare, tens of thousands of Jews realised the danger they were in and fled the country in panic. Hitler's dream of a "racially pure" Germany was moving closer to reality. By the time war broke out in September 1939, around 282,000 of Germany's original 500,000 Jews had already emigrated.

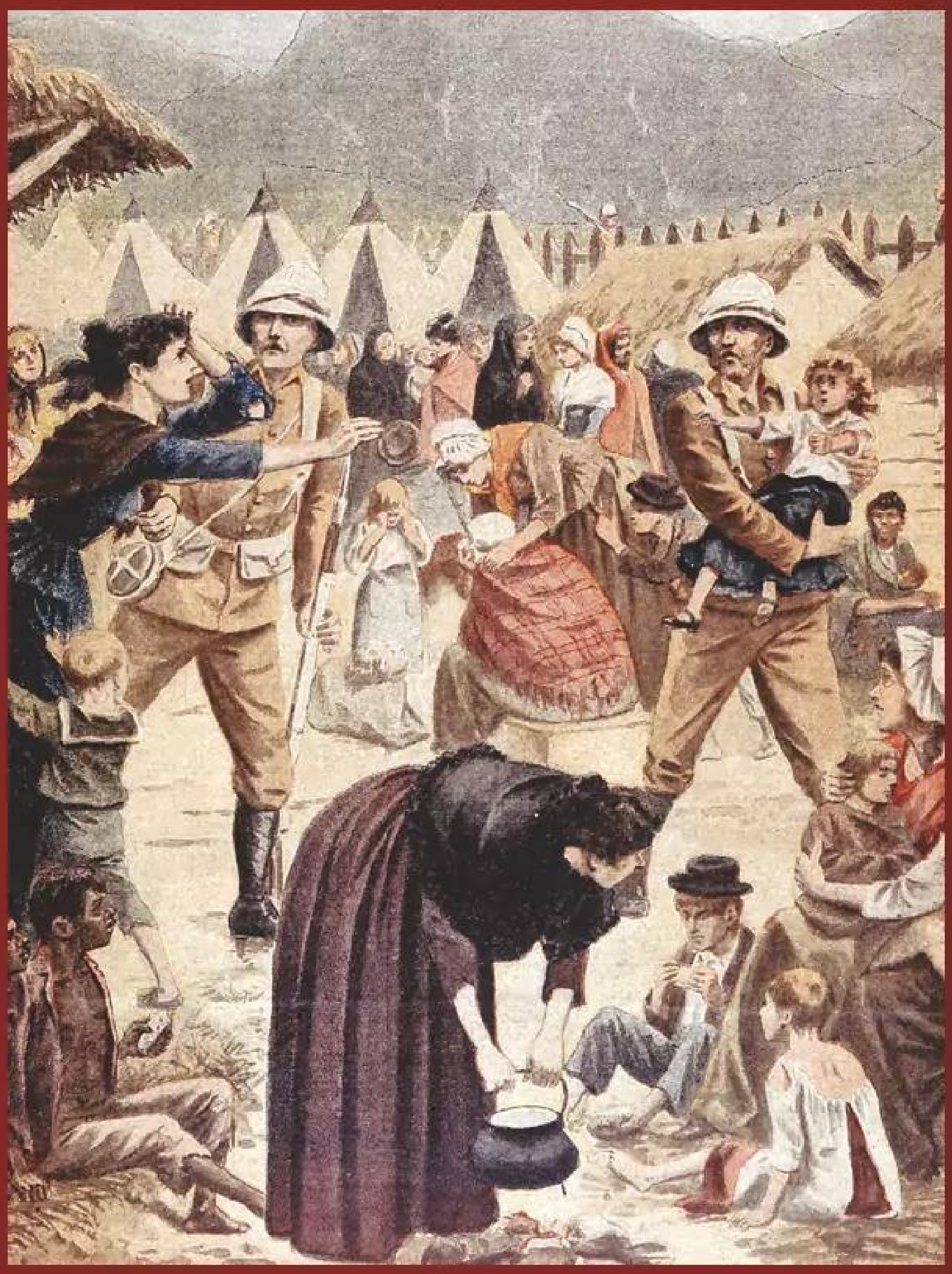
FIRST CAMPS WERE BRITISH

In 1901, during the Boer War in South Africa, the British occupying power established a series of concentration camps as a countermeasure to enemy guerrillas. The British burned down Boer farms, slaughtered their livestock and locked up women and children so they couldn't aid the rebels.

Conditions in the 45 internment camps were inhumane. Prisoners were crammed into tents or huts, and due to the poor hygienic conditions, diseases such as typhus, measles and scarlet fever were rampant.

"Carts came down the rows of tents to pick up the dead. There were funerals every day," recalled Hester Uys, who was interned in a camp at the age of eight.

In the final years of the war, over 100,000 women and children were trapped in the camps, and in total, around 20,000 Boers perished.



A child is taken from her mother in a British camp in the Transvaal province.

ANN RONAN PICTURE LIBRARY HERITAGE-IMAGES/IMAGESELECT

1881

Assassination attempt on Tsar led to persecution

In March 1881, a bomb attack on Tsar Alexander II in St Petersburg, Russia, triggered violent attacks on Jews in the country. The murder was committed by a revolutionary socialist, but many Russians suspected that Jews were behind the attack and took to the streets in a frenzy of hatred and bloodlust. Murder, looting and rape soon became commonplace, especially so in Kiev (now Kyiv) and other Ukrainian cities, where the death toll was high.

A collection of Torah scrolls damaged during the persecutions.

JEWISH CHRONICLE ARCHIVE HERITAGE

1903

Jews murdered after rumours of infanticide

An anti-Jewish pogrom in Kishinev, then the capital of the Russian province of Bessarabia, shocked the world. The persecution was sparked by rumours that the city's Jews had murdered a child to use its blood in a ritual. Over the course of three days, the townspeople killed 49 Jews, while 92 were seriously injured and around 500 were slightly injured.

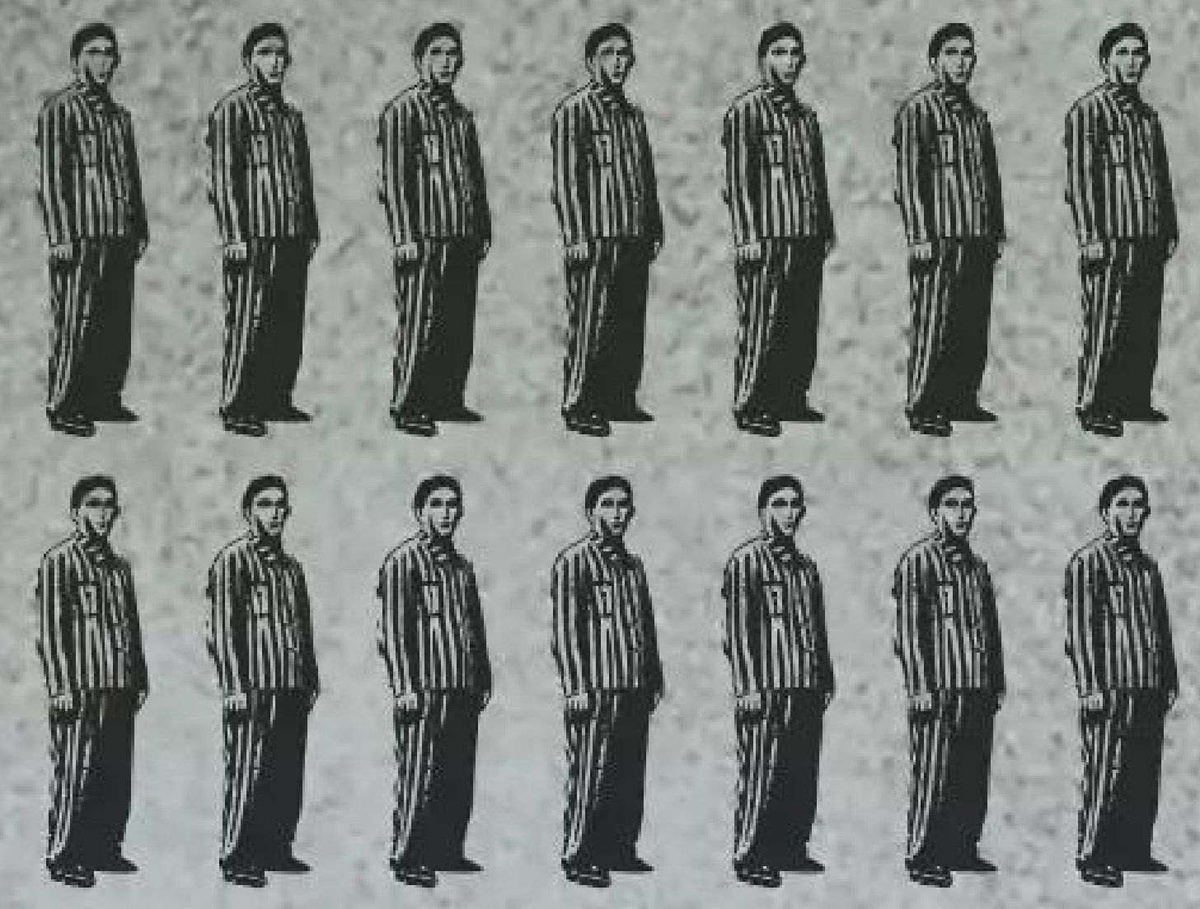
UNKNOWN

HOLOCAUST IN NUMBERS

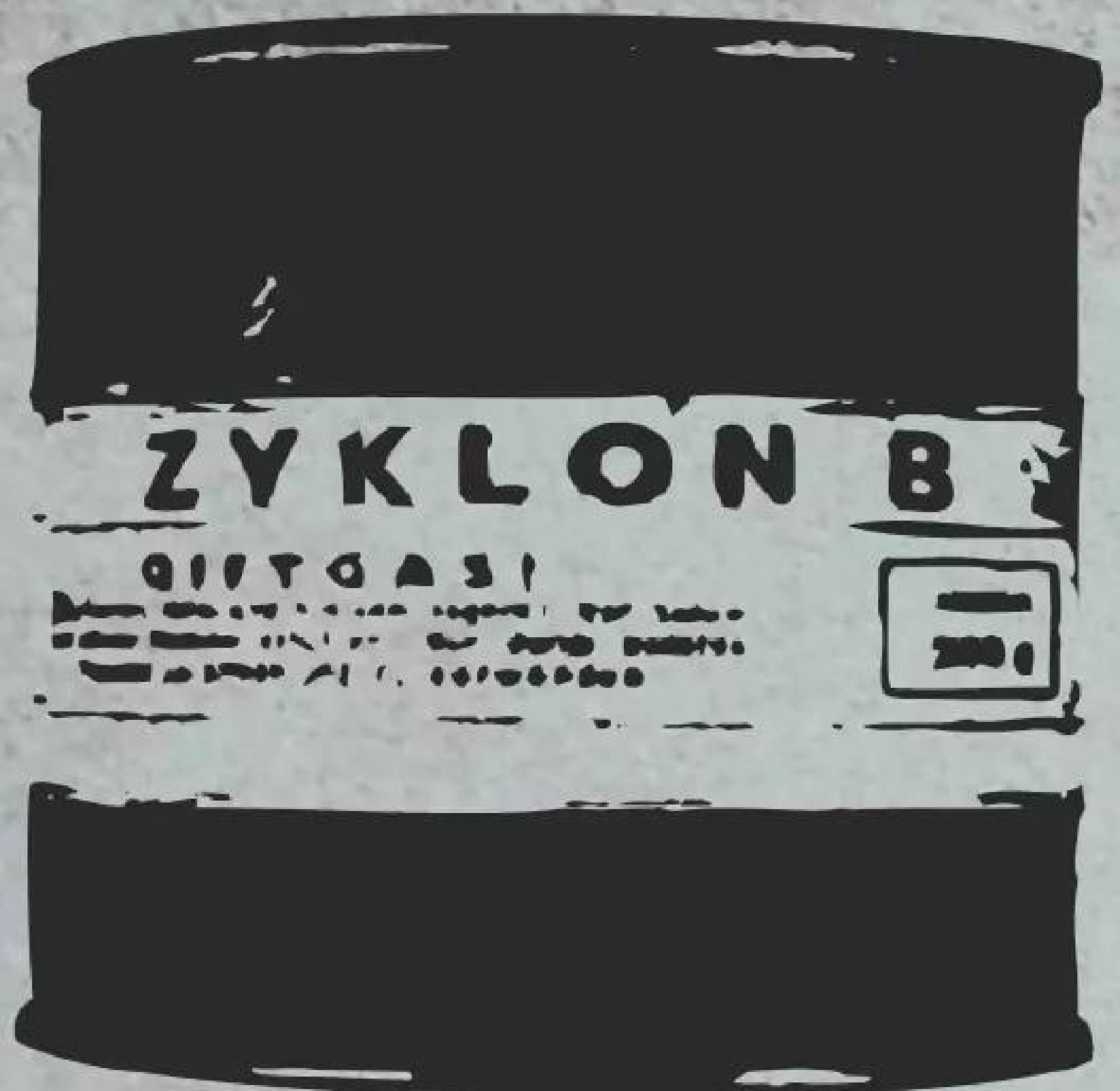
The scale of the Holocaust is impossible to comprehend. In just a few years, the Nazis killed millions of Jews and other avowed enemies, with unimaginable efficiency.

By David Dragsted

6m dead



The names of 4.8 million victims can be found in the database of Yad Vashem (The World Holocaust Remembrance Centre) in Israel.



ZYKLON B can kill people in **5-10 minutes** at a concentration of 300 ppm (parts per million).

The crematoria in Birkenau could burn **4,700** people a day.

The total extermination capacity of the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex was **150,000** people per month.

7,000

prisoners were liberated from Auschwitz in 1945.

110,000 shoes

and more than a tonne of hair from dead victims is on display in Auschwitz today.

Over a period of five years,

8,400

people were employed at Auschwitz. Fewer than 800 SS members from the concentration camp were charged with crimes against humanity after the war.

3,218,000

people were killed in the six Nazi extermination camps – Auschwitz, Bełzec, Chełmno, Majdanek, Sobibór and Treblinka.

At least

1.32 million

Jews were killed by the Nazis in just 100 days during Operation Reinhard.

Throughout the war, the Nazis controlled up to

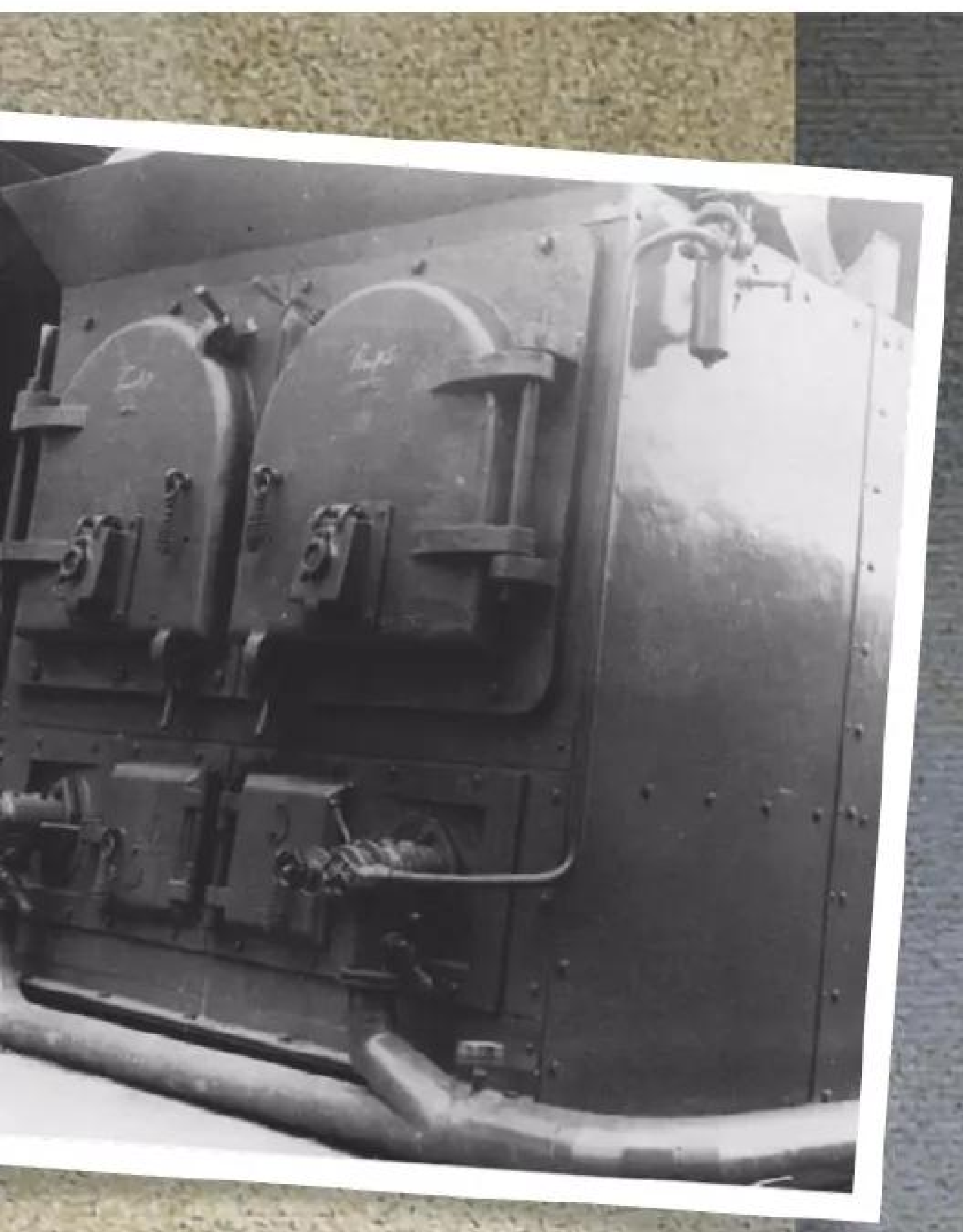
40,000

concentration camps and Jewish ghettos across Europe.

5,000 prisoners per train

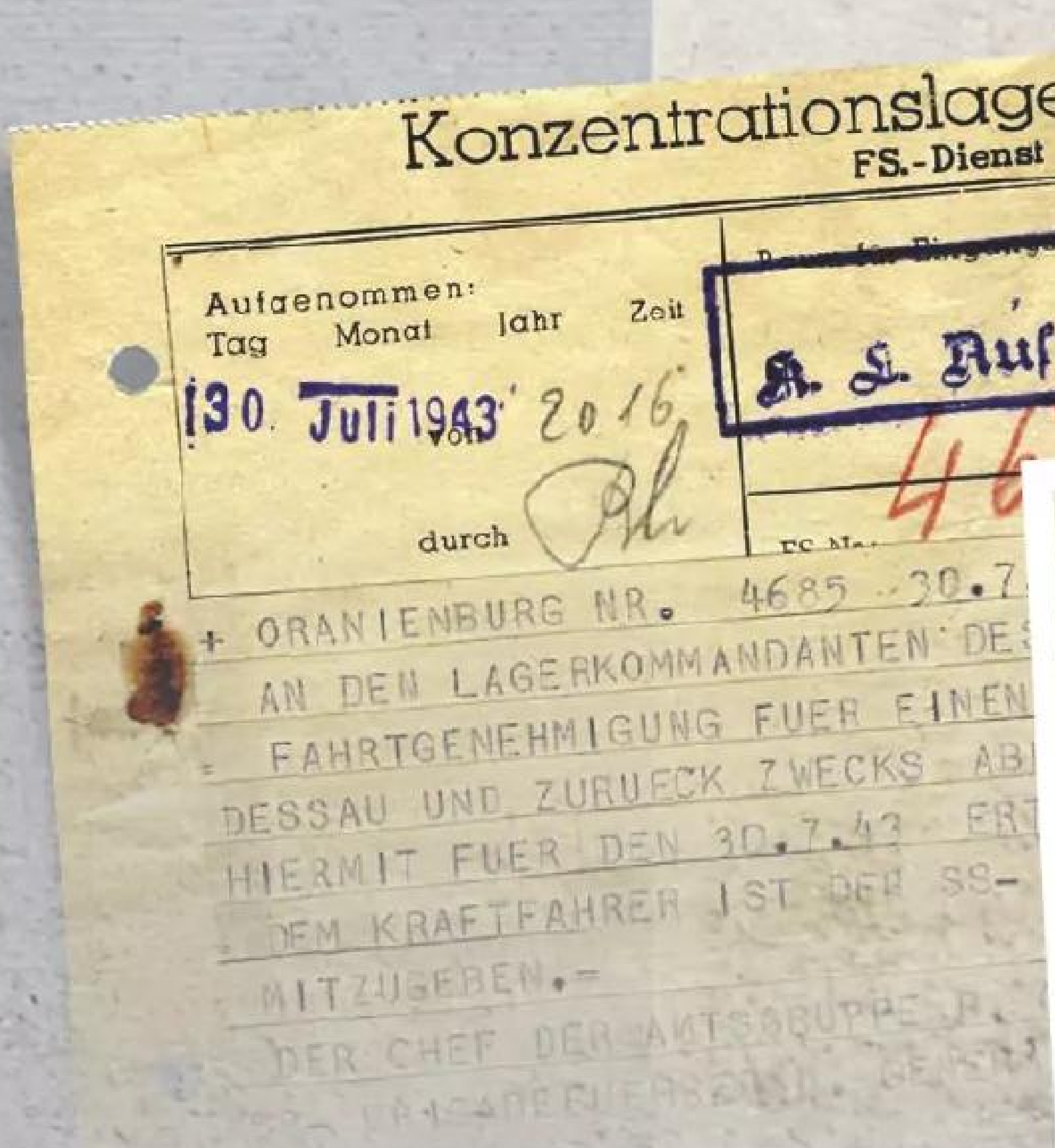
The average train wagon used to transport prisoners was eight metres long, 2.5 metres wide and two metres high. One wagon typically held 100 prisoners, and each train had 50 wagons.

87009
34
34 87009
34 87009



THE HOLOCAUST'S LARGEST CRIME SCENE

Auschwitz was the largest and most notorious of the Nazi concentration and extermination camps. With Commandant Rudolf Höss at the helm, the camp was transformed into an efficient killing factory. Meanwhile, a few brave souls tried to report on the horrors from the depths of hell.



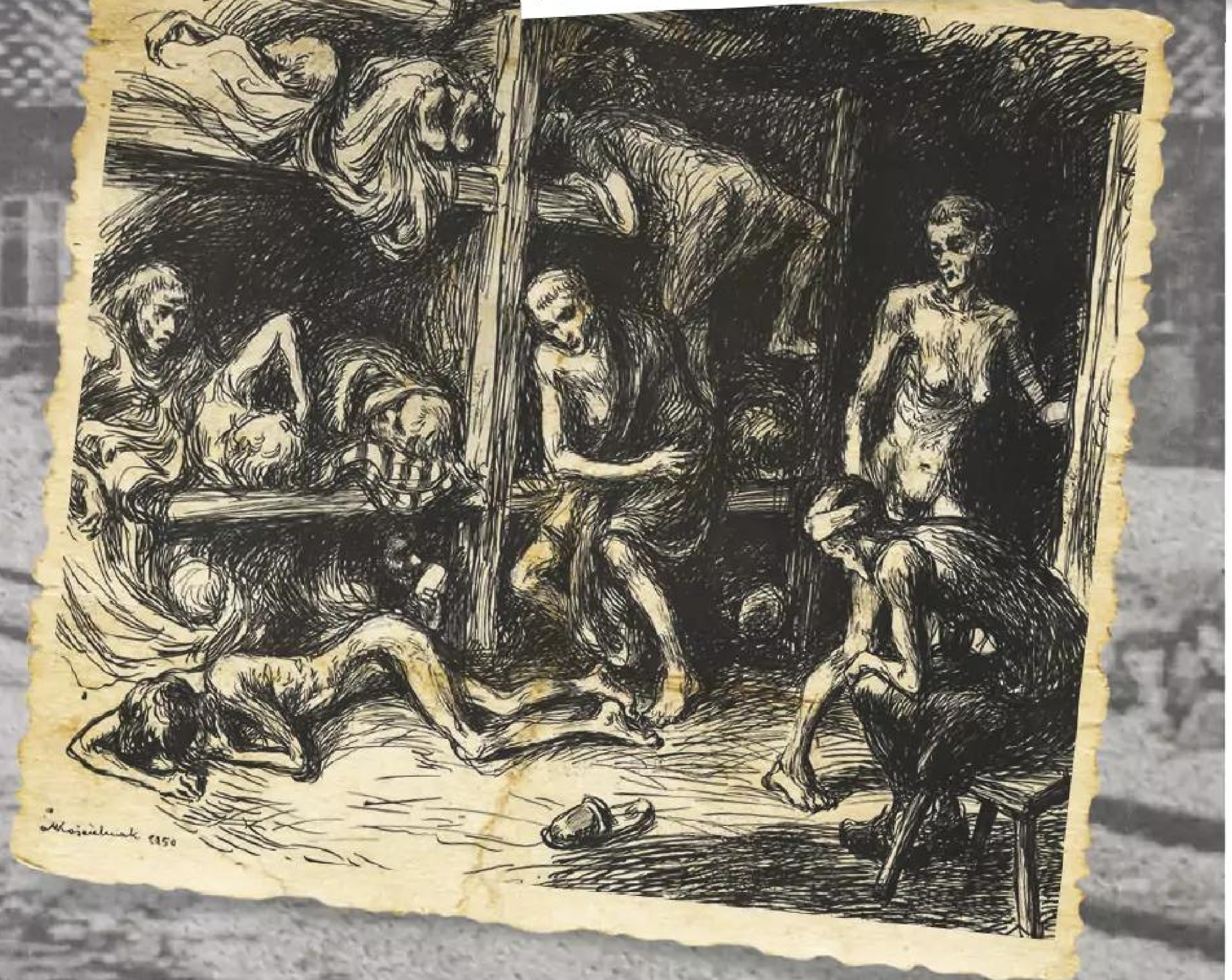
Konzentrationslager Auschwitz III/3
FS.-Dienst

Aufgenommen:
Tag Monat Jahr Zeit
130. Juli 1943 2016
durch Ph

K. L. Auſchwitz
4685

Befördert:
Tag Monat Jahr Zeit
4-38
an
Stz. 122

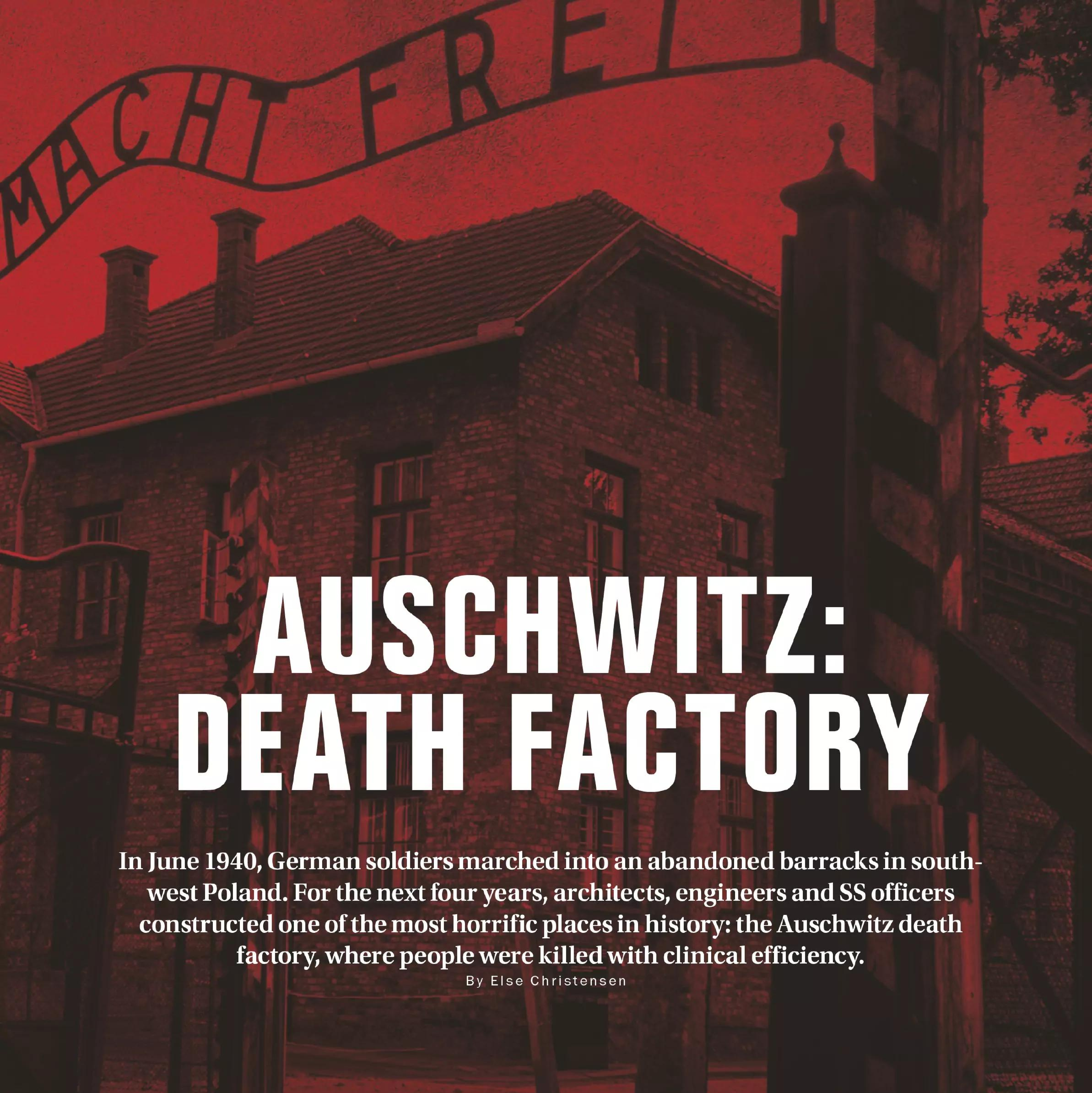
+ ORANIENBURG NR. 4685 30.7.
AN DEN LAGERKOMMANDANTEN DE
FAHRTGENEHMIGUNG FUER EINEN
DESSAU UND ZURUECK ZWECKS AB
HIERMIT FUER DEN 30.7.43 ER
DEM KRAFTFAHRER IST DER SS-
MITZUGEBEN.-
DER CHEF DER AMTSGRUPPE



Historians estimate that 1.1 million people lost their lives in Auschwitz alone – mostly women, children and the elderly, who were sent to their deaths in the gas chambers.

AUSCHWITZ MEMORIAL MUSEUM & UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MUSEUM & SHUTTERSTOCK

HALT
ARBEIT M



AUSCHWITZ: DEATH FACTORY

In June 1940, German soldiers marched into an abandoned barracks in south-west Poland. For the next four years, architects, engineers and SS officers constructed one of the most horrific places in history: the Auschwitz death factory, where people were killed with clinical efficiency.

By Else Christensen

In June 1940, German soldiers stepped on to a parade ground between a row of worn red barracks in southern Poland. Only nine months had passed since the Germans had invaded their neighbour. With shocking speed, the German army had occupied Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium and France, and all signs indicated that the Third Reich would soon subjugate all of Europe.

Meanwhile, the barracks in Oswiecim – known in German as Auschwitz – were to be used as a concentration camp for the regime's Polish enemies: intellectuals, political activists and priests. Like all German concentration camps, Auschwitz came under the control of the elite Nazi SS, and career officer Rudolf Höss was placed in command. The 39-year-old lieutenant colonel had already made a name for himself in senior roles at the Dachau and Sachsenhausen concentration camps. Höss had already seen how hard work helped pacify the prisoners, so as newly appointed commandant, he decided to transfer Dachau's motto *Arbeit Macht Frei* (Work makes one free) to Auschwitz, where the words – wrought in iron – would adorn the camp's main entrance.

For Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, the area around Auschwitz held unimaginable possibilities. The marshy and sparsely populated Polish countryside would be converted into farmland and incorporated into the Nazis' "Greater Germanic Reich" – an entirely new society populated of "pure-blood" colonists that the Nazis wanted to establish in the East. There, immigrant German colonists would benefit from Slavic forced labour.

Himmler therefore immediately ordered the camp to be expanded from its existing capacity of 10,000 prisoners to house 30,000. The new buildings would be almost impossible to build on the marshy ground, the camp's commanders argued, but Himmler insisted on giving the project top priority:

"Gentlemen, this project will be completed; my reasons for this are more important than your objections!" the SS chief stated haughtily. And with those words, Polish political prisoners set about expanding Auschwitz's barracks.

The plan was that some of the camp's prisoners would later be put to work for SS-owned companies that supplied building materials for Hitler's grandiose works in Berlin. The rest would either labour on farms or for private German companies such as the chemical conglomerate IG Farben, which experimented with making synthetic fuel and other useful war materiel.

War changed all plans

Plans for a German colony at Auschwitz never materialised, and soon Himmler had other things on his mind than his Aryan fantasies. On 22nd June 1941, the German army invaded the Soviet Union, and before long, huge streams of Soviet prisoners of war began flowing westwards – many of them to camps in Poland and not least Auschwitz.

To make room for hundreds of thousands of Red Army prisoners, the SS took over an area of land near the village of Brzezinka – renamed Birkenau by the Germans – two kilometres from the original camp. There, on fields that were often flooded, the new arrivals were tasked with building a brand-new concentration camp to accommodate the many Soviet prisoners.

The hard labour involved in the construction and Birkenau's unhealthy environment quickly proved deadly for the prisoners. Starved on a diet of thin soup and a few grams of bread, their bodies soon gave way. Every night, new men succumbed in Auschwitz's leaky barracks, where damp rose up through the dirt floor.

"They could bear the cold, but not the dampness and wearing clothes which were always wet. This together with the primitive, half-finished, hastily thrown-together barracks at the start of Camp Birkenau caused the death rate to steadily climb," reported camp commandant Höss.

Ovens couldn't keep up

The prisoners' high mortality rate did not go unnoticed by Höss, who watched the growing piles of corpses with concern. The camp's crematorium was designed to burn the dead from the original labour camp of 10,000 prisoners, so bodies had started to pile up in Auschwitz's morgues and on the paths between barracks.

As the piles grew, fears of deadly epidemics increased. Höss quickly realised that the problem of disposing of the corpses would only get worse – especially when Birkenau with its 100,000 prisoners was completed. He therefore tasked Auschwitz's construction manager and architect Karl Bischoff with devising a solution to get rid of the bodies. The architect's thoughts immediately turned to the Central German city of Erfurt, where the Topf & Söhne company was based.

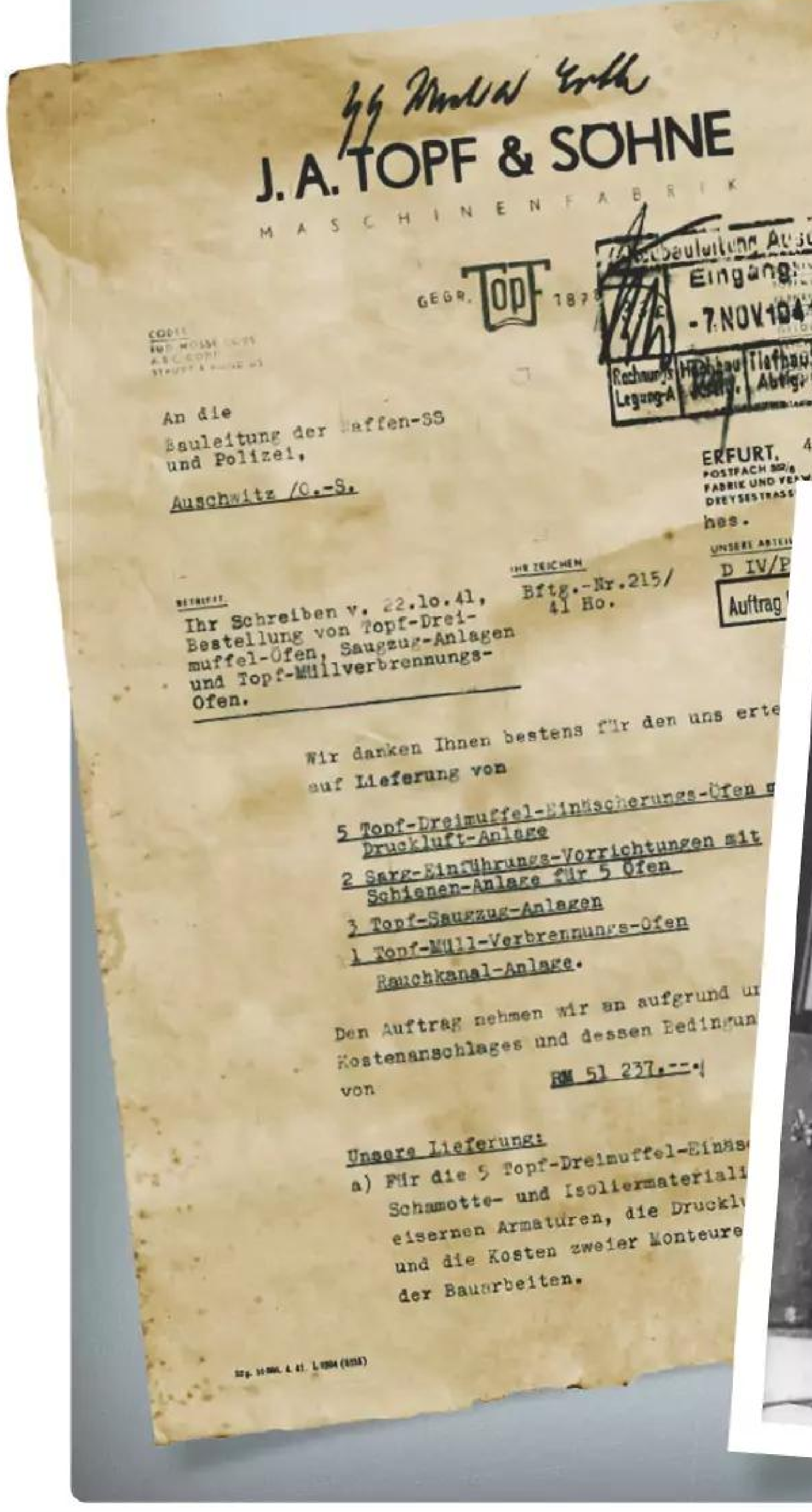
The reputable family company – led by brothers Ernst and Ludwig Topf – had

OVEN MANUFACTURER MADE EXTERMINATIONS POSSIBLE

For eight years, a family company from Erfurt took pride in delivering efficient ovens to the death camps.

In 1937, the leaders of Dachau decided to install a crematorium in the concentration camp. Until then, its dead had been cremated in the nearby local crematorium, but the solution was both expensive and impractical. The ovens of the time were designed to shut down between each burning so that the ashes of the deceased were not mixed – a procedure that was unnecessary in the new camps. So, the camp management contacted the industrial company Topf & Söhne, which had just developed a cheap and extremely powerful cremation oven.

The raw, functional model was designed to run 24 hours a day using a simple system that sucked compressed air into the oven. This method greatly increased the temperature and significantly shortened the time it took to cremate a corpse. From 1937, Topf & Söhne became a regular supplier of ovens to the concentration camps. With no qualms, Topf & Söhne continuously streamlined their ovens to best remove the tell-tale traces of Nazi mass murder.



J. A. TOPF & SÖHNE
MASCHINENFABRIK
GEGR. TOPF 187

Eingang:
-7.NOV 1941

An die
Bauleitung der Waffen-SS
und Polizei,
Auschwitz /O.-S.

ERFURT, 4.11.41.
POSTFACH
FABRIK UND VERWALTUNG
hes.
Bftg.-Nr.215/
41 Ho.
D IV/P

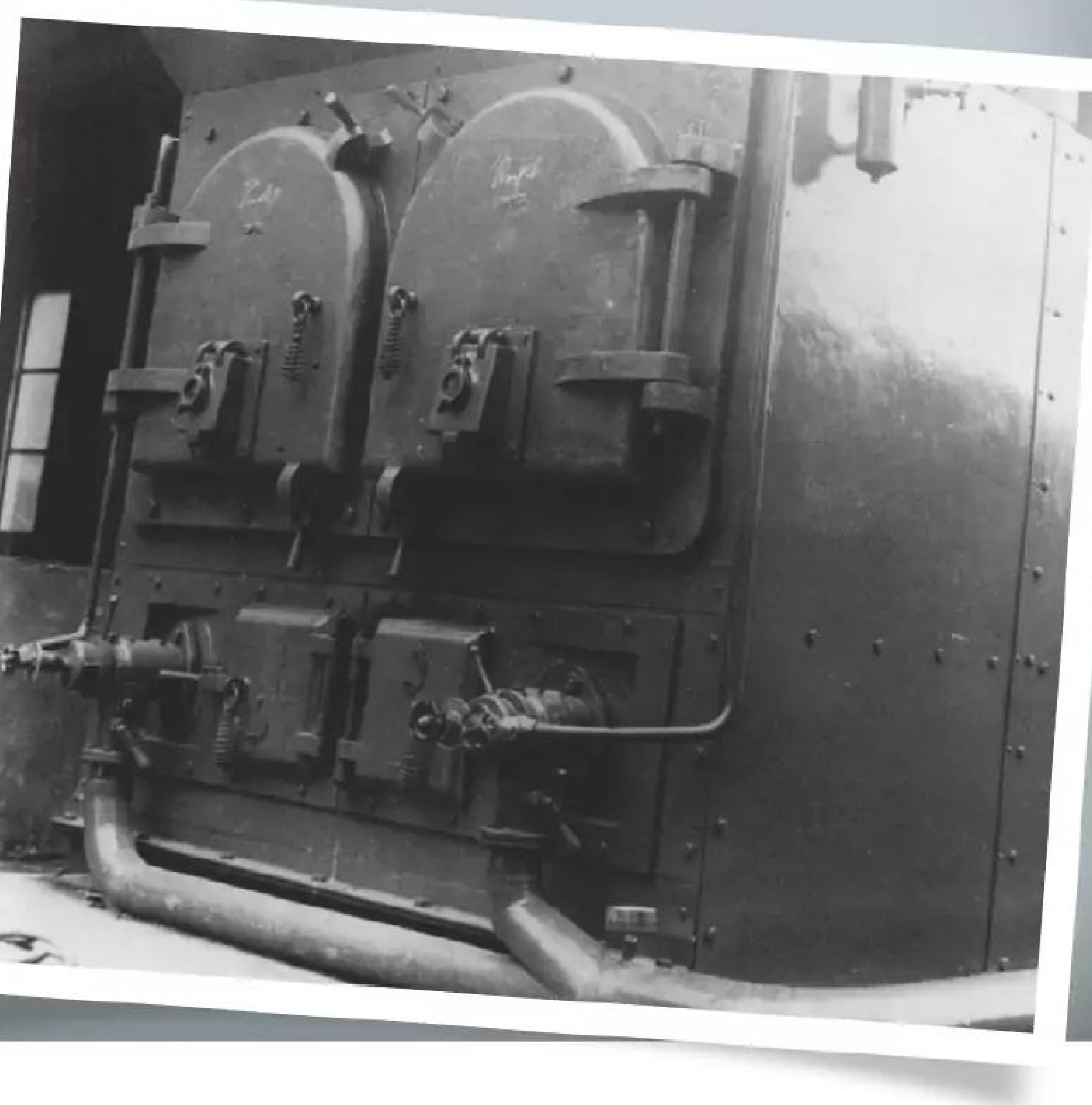
Ihr Schreiben v. 22.10.41,
Bestellung von Topf-Drei-
muffel-Öfen, Saugzug-Anlagen
und Topf-Müllverbrennungs-
Ofen.

Wir danken Ihnen bestens für den uns erte
auf Lieferung von

5 Topf-Dreimuffel-Einäscherungs-Öfen
Druckluft-Anlage
2 Sarg-Einführungs-Vorrichtungen mit
Schienen-Anlage für 5 Öfen
3 Topf-Saugzug-Anlagen
1 Topf-Müll-Verbrennungs-Ofen
Rauchkanal-Anlage.

Den Auftrag nehmen wir an aufgrund u
Kostenanschlages und dessen Bedingun
von RM 51 237.--

Unsere Lieferung:
a) Für die 5 Topf-Dreimuffel-Einäs
Schamotte- und Isoliermateriali
eisernen Armaturen, die Druckl
und die Kosten zweier Monteure
der Bauarbeiten.



In 1941, Topf & Söhne received its first orders from Auschwitz.

BUCHENWALD AND MITTELBAU-DORA MEMORIALS FOUNDATION

RUDOLF HÖSS

US HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

SS officer Rudolf Höss was Auschwitz's longest-serving camp commandant and primarily responsible for the concentration camp's systematic extermination of Jews.

been a regular supplier of ovens to concentration camp crematoria since 1937. Topf & Söhne had installed the first oven in Auschwitz, and in October 1941, Bischoff cabled the company, which sent Kurt Prüfer, its best salesman, to Poland.

The son of a locomotive driver, Prüfer had completed his studies as a mechanical engineer after World War I and had been rewarded with a trusted position at Topf & Söhne. There he'd successfully developed a type of furnace that proved to meet the needs of the concentration camp.

While ordinary ovens were usually decorated to resemble small churches or Greek temples, Prüfer's ovens were crude and functional. The ovens were also not designed to be switched off after each cremation, a measure used by civilian crematoria to collect the ashes between each burning. Even the normal technical niceties that made the smoke clear and odourless were missing.

The meeting between salesman Prüfer and architect Bischoff at the

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

ARRIVAL

> **"After days of travelling in cattle trucks, the doors were ripped open. The first thing the prisoners saw were armed SS men shouting, barking dogs and shadowy figures in striped uniforms"**
>
> Leo Eitinger, Norwegian prisoner

> **"We were kicked out of the railway trucks, and the SS started to shout at our doctor, trying to find out why he was the only man on the transport… 'I am a doctor, and … [m]y role is to accompany the transport and I was told I would then go back to Slovakia.' Then an SS officer pulled out a gun and shot him dead"**
>
> Silvia Veselá, Slovakian Jew, arrived at Auschwitz in 1942

> **"When it was over it was just like a fairground. There was a load of rubbish, and next to this rubbish were ill people, unable to walk, perhaps a child that had lost its mother ... and these people were simply killed with a shot through the head"**
>
> Oskar Gröning, SS private, was involved in the guarding of the prisoners' luggage

The railway tracks led right into Birkenau – the extermination camp that was part of the Auschwitz complex.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

PRISONERS BUILT BIRKENAU

Thousands of Soviet prisoners of war flocked to Auschwitz in autumn 1941. To increase capacity, they were set to expand the camp.

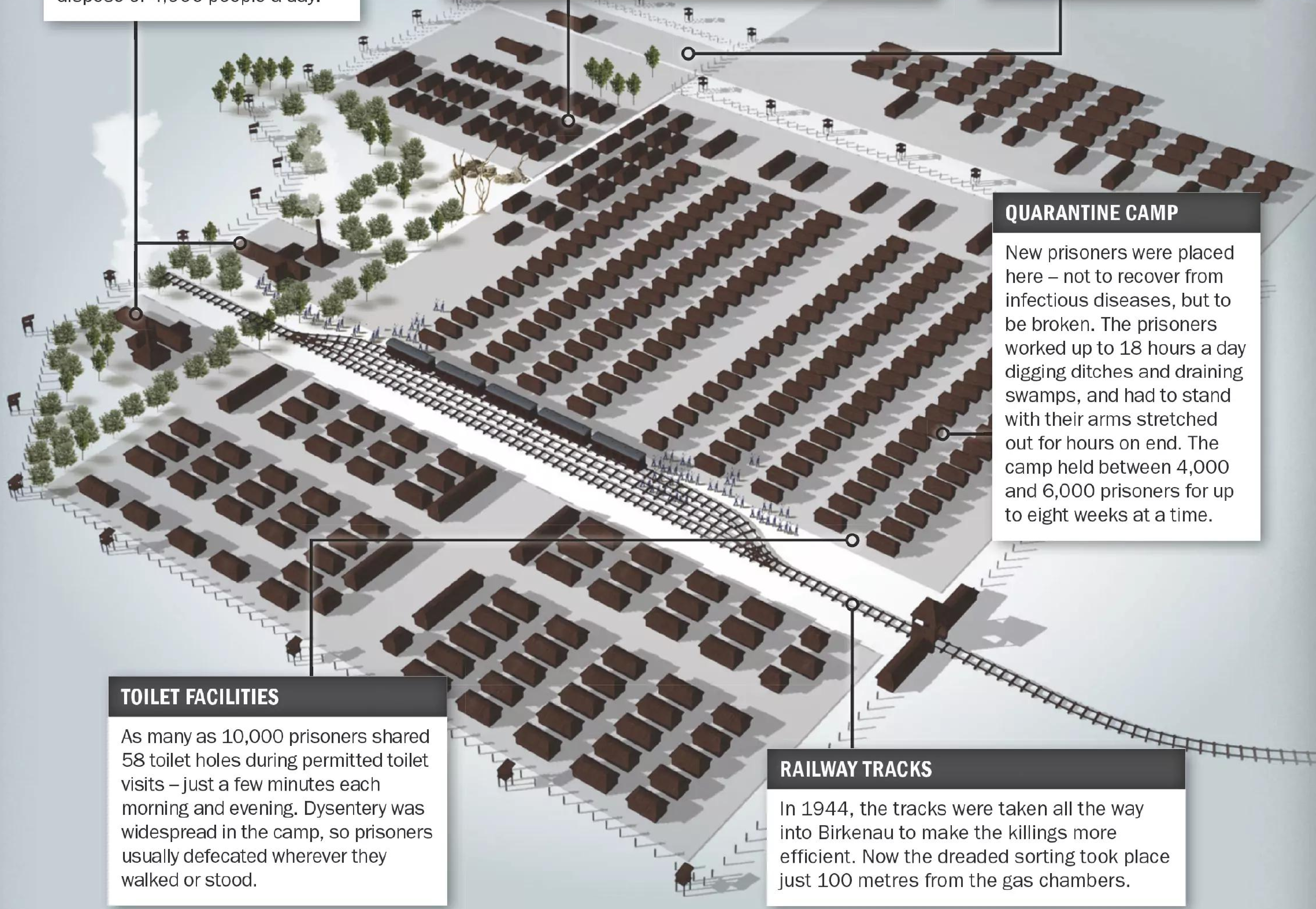
By 1941, Auschwitz had become too small for its ever-growing number of prisoners. As a result, newly arrived PoWs were put to work draining and levelling a marshy area two kilometres away, beginning construction of Auschwitz II, which was named Birkenau.

With its four gas chambers and associated crematoria, the camp became the centre of Auschwitz's Jewish exterminations. In the beginning, the train tracks did not lead all the way into Birkenau but stopped outside the camp's distinctive main entrance. When the cattle wagons with Jews rolled up, sorting began immediately.

All belongings were confiscated and transported to the camp's warehouses. Those able to work were then sent to the 'quarantine camp', where they had to be broken physically and mentally to avoid rebellion. Later they ended up in the men's and women's barracks. Children, the elderly and the incapacitated were sent directly to the gas chambers, which were shielded from the rest of the camp. Birkenau was constantly expanding until the Red Army's approach in 1944.

CLAUS LUNAUAU & AUSCHWITZ MUSEUM

On a bare, marshy spot outside the main Auschwitz camp, prisoners built their own death camp.



CREMATORIUM II AND III

Tucked away behind birch trees were the gas chambers and crematoria. The highly efficient crematoria could exterminate and dispose of 4,000 people a day.

KANADA

The warehouses were crammed with suitcases, clothes, glasses and gold teeth by the thousands. Everything had been stolen from the murdered and transported here by Jewish prisoners – they ironically named it *Kanada* (Canada) after the USA's northern neighbour. The job of sorting belongings was coveted. It provided access to the food carried by the deceased in their luggage.

CREMATION BURIALS

When the crematoria couldn't keep up, Jewish prisoners burned the dead in large mass graves. A total of 107,000 bodies were burned on the outskirts of Birkenau.

QUARANTINE CAMP

New prisoners were placed here – not to recover from infectious diseases, but to be broken. The prisoners worked up to 18 hours a day digging ditches and draining swamps, and had to stand with their arms stretched out for hours on end. The camp held between 4,000 and 6,000 prisoners for up to eight weeks at a time.

TOILET FACILITIES

As many as 10,000 prisoners shared 58 toilet holes during permitted toilet visits – just a few minutes each morning and evening. Dysentery was widespread in the camp, so prisoners usually defecated wherever they walked or stood.

RAILWAY TRACKS

In 1944, the tracks were taken all the way into Birkenau to make the killings more efficient. Now the dreaded sorting took place just 100 metres from the gas chambers.

end of October 1941 was the first step on the Auschwitz concentration camp's road to becoming a death factory. Before long, thick, pitch-black, foul-smelling smoke rose from the crematorium chimneys of the concentration camp, darkening the sky above Auschwitz.

SS couldn't cope with mass killings

While Prüfer, Höss and Bischoff were drawing up plans for the Auschwitz crematoria, German troops were still advancing along the Eastern Front. In their wake came the dreaded Einsatzgruppen – SS death squads tasked with capturing, executing and then burying Soviet Jews in mass graves. The mass executions were carried out by shooting, but this proved far harder for the Einsatzgruppen than Himmler had considered when he devised the method at his desk in Berlin.

After Himmler had witnessed a mass execution of Jews in Minsk, several of his entourage were clearly shaken. One SS man even broke all protocols and begged not to view any more killings:

"I can't take it any more. Can't you get me out of here?" pleaded the man, who was in a state of obvious distress. Another of Himmler's companions, Obergruppenführer von dem Bach Zelewski, was also deeply concerned.

"Reichsführer, that was only a hundred! ... Look at the men, how deeply shaken they are! Such men are finished for the rest of their lives!" he urgently warned his superior.

After his visit, Himmler searched for a solution to spare German soldiers the agony of executing innocent civilians. In the autumn, the SS tried various forms of execution, including blowing people up. However, this method proved just as problematic as the shootings had been. After the explosion, the bodies were scattered over a wide area and severed arms and legs hung in the trees.

Soviets were the first victims

The solution to the 'problem' was found in Auschwitz. There, too, the camp's commanders had problems with staff psyche after shooting sick prisoners. However, in the autumn of 1941, Karl Fritzsch, Höss's second in command, had an idea. In the camp's warehouse were stack after stack of small round cans of Zyklon B, a well-known agent for delousing clothes, furniture and carpets. Perhaps – Fritzsch thought – it could also be used to kill people.

Fritzsch, who was in command while Höss was on business, took immediate action. The basement of Block 11, the camp's dreaded prison, was set aside to house the experiment, and prisoners were put to work shovelling dirt in front of the windows. Soon after, a grotesque procession approached the building. Starving Soviet officers in ragged uniforms were herded into the basement. Wounded Red Army soldiers followed, hobbling on crutches or lying on dirty stretchers. The prisoners were destined to be the first victims of the Zyklon gas at Auschwitz. Upon Höss's return, Fritzsch could proudly talk about his successful experiment and even demonstrate it to his boss on a new selection of Soviets.

Commandant Höss was thrilled: "I viewed the killings wearing a gas mask for protection. Death occurred in the »

■ **EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS**

SORTING

"We arrived at Auschwitz station and had to align in rows... The painful scenes began there. They were separating the young from old and children. They separated my father from my mother and myself. From that moment I heard nothing about my father"

Eva Votavová, Slovakian Jew, arrived at Auschwitz in summer 1942

"Sick people were lifted on to Red Cross lorries – [the SS] always tried to create the impression that people had nothing to fear"

Oskar Gröning, SS private, on the sorting that sent the sick directly to the gas chamber

"Everyone had to line up in long rows. Men and women separately. An officer inspected the rows and divided the new arrivals into two groups by pointing to the right or left. Young, able-bodied prisoners were sent to one side, old, sick and children to the other. To the gas chambers"

Leo Eitinger, Norwegian prisoner

Anyone younger than 15 was sent to their death along with the disabled, elderly and mothers who wouldn't let go of their children.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

GASSINGS

“At first they went calmly into the rooms where they were supposed to be disinfected. But some of them showed signs of alarm, and spoke of death by suffocation and of annihilation. A sort of panic set in at once. Immediately all the Jews still outside were pushed into the chambers, and the doors were screwed shut. With subsequent transports the difficult individuals were picked out early on and most carefully supervised. At the first sign of unrest, those responsible were unobtrusively led behind the building and killed with a small calibre gun that was inaudible to the others”

Camp commander Rudolf Höss

“The SS guards disappeared... Suddenly the door was closed; it had been gas-proofed with rubber and reinforced with iron fittings. Those inside heard the heavy bolts being secured. A deadly, paralysing terror gripped the victims. They started to beat on the door, hammering it with their fists in helpless rage and despair”

Pery Broad, SS guard

“When they opened the door, I see ... them all standing up, some black and blue from the gas. No place where to go. Dead. If I close my eyes, the only thing I see is standing up, women with children in their hands”

Dario Gabbai, Greek Jew, member of the Sonderkommando that disposed of the bodies

crammed-full cells immediately after the gas was thrown in. Only a brief choking outcry and it was all over.”

In fact, these executions also proved problematic. Auschwitz escapee August Kowalczyk later described how death dragged on agonisingly in the improvised gas chamber. The guards had trouble making the room completely airtight, and struggled to find the right dose of Zyklon B. As a result, death took up to half an hour, and several prisoners remained alive a day after being gassed.

“So they strengthened the dose. More crystals were poured in,” Kowalczyk said of the SS experiments.

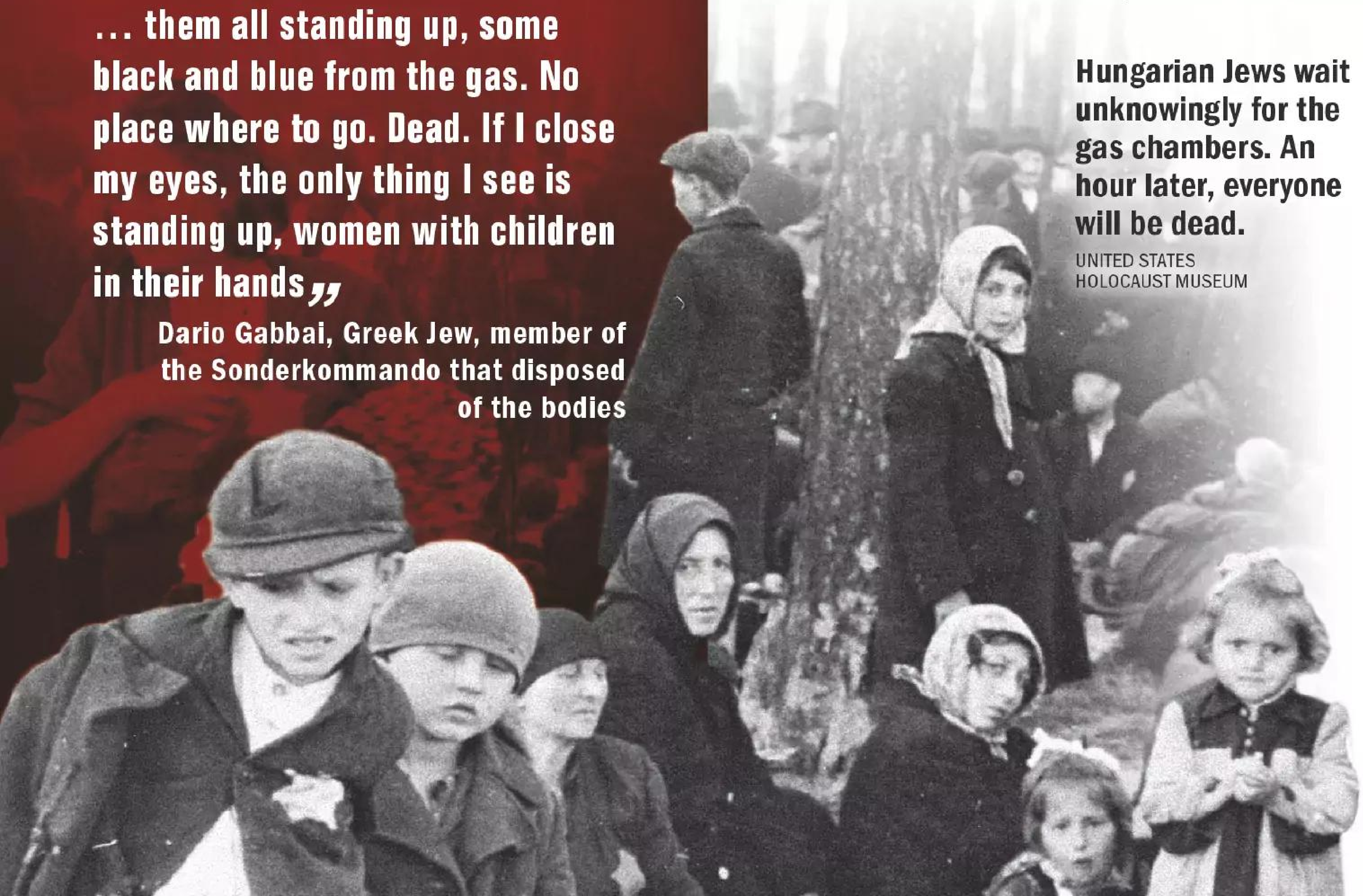
The camp's management, however, considered this a success and Höss, who had “always shuddered at the prospect of carrying out extermination by shooting”, was “relieved to think that we were to be spared all these blood-baths”.

Hitler demanded Jews be wiped out

December 1941 saw a changing of German fortunes in the war. In the east, its troops were halted by the Red Army and a bitterly cold Russian winter; in the west, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor catapulted the US – the world's biggest industrial power – into the war.

As so often in his political career, Hitler resorted to anti-Semitism to rally the German population. At a meeting with Himmler, Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels and other senior Nazis on 12th December, the Führer declared that the time had come to exterminate Europe's Jews.

Since the meeting took place in Hitler's private apartment, there are no official minutes, but diary entries and notes from the participants leave no doubt about the agenda. “As regards the Jewish question, the Führer is resolved to clear the air... The world war is here, the destruction of the Jews must be the inevitable consequence. The question must be seen without sentimentality,” Goebbels wrote the next day in his diary.



Hungarian Jews wait unknowingly for the gas chambers. An hour later, everyone will be dead.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

How the Jews would be exterminated was discussed a month later at a conference in Wannsee, just outside Berlin, followed by a series of meetings between Hitler and Himmler in the months that followed. In June 1942, Höss was summoned to Berlin, where the Reichsführer was waiting with an important message:

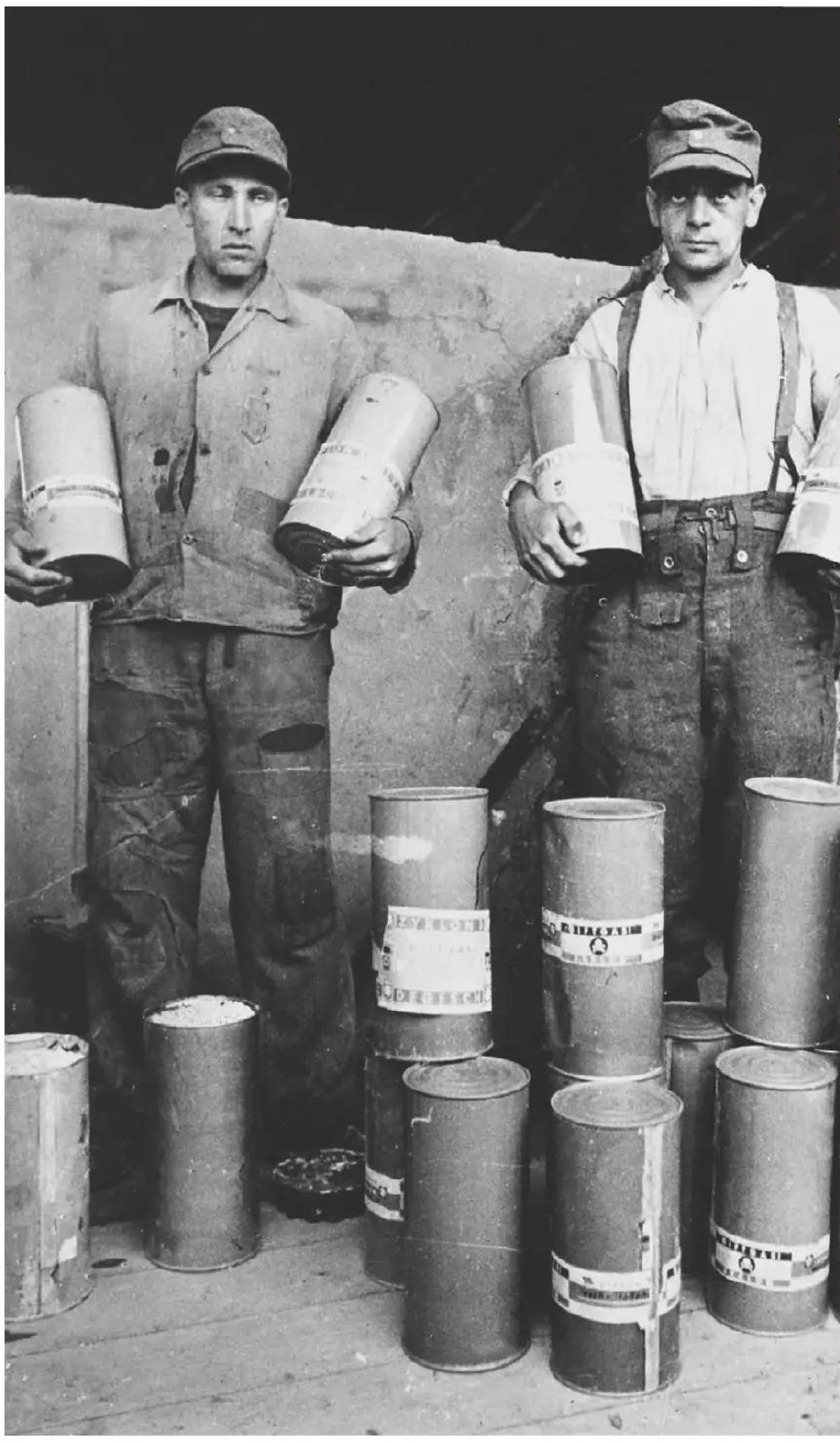
> **“I viewed the killings wearing a gas mask for protection. Death occurred in [the] cells immediately after the gas was thrown in”**
>
> RUDOLF HÖSS

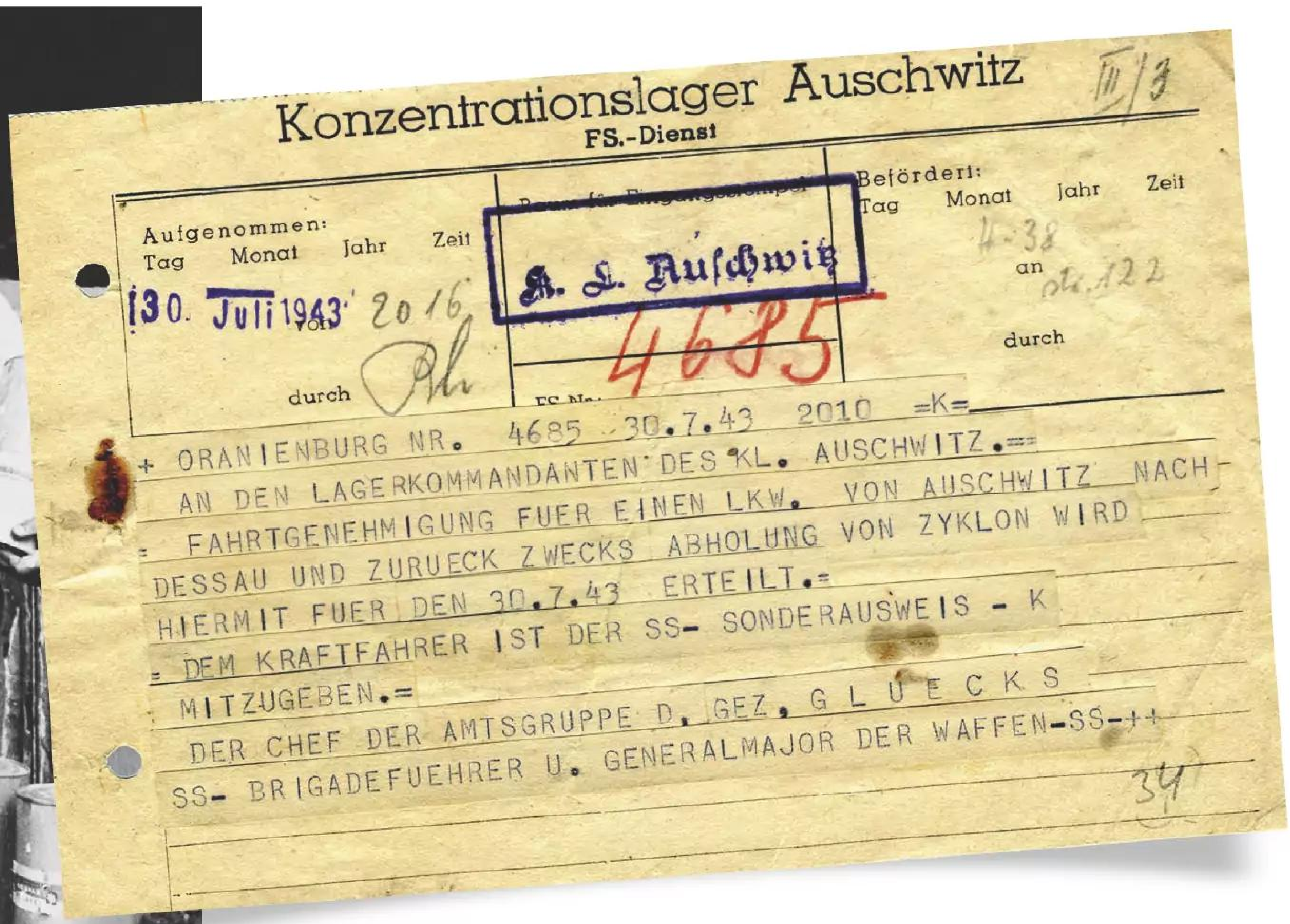
“The Führer has ordered the Final Solution of the Jewish question. We the SS have to carry out this order,” Himmler announced.

“I have, therefore, chosen Auschwitz for this purpose. First of all, because of the advantageous transport facilities, and secondly, because it allows this area to be easily isolated and disguised.” With these words, the systematic collection and extermination of Europe's Jews began in Auschwitz.

Prisoners shocked into submission

During 1942, the packed cattle trucks began to roll on to the train tracks at Birkenau in earnest. After days spent in darkness, the Jews were subjected to a carefully planned strategy to shock them into a state of stunned passivity upon arrival. As soon as the doors opened, guards barked orders and German Shepherds barked loudly. The SS men rained blows on the prisoners





Konzentrationslager Auschwitz III/3
FS.-Dienst

Aufgenommen: Tag Monat Jahr Zeit
30. Juli 1943 2016
von
durch

K. L. Auschwitz
4685

Befördert: Tag Monat Jahr Zeit
4-38
an
durch

FS Nr. 4685 30.7.43 2010 =K=

+ ORANIENBURG NR. 4685 30.7.43 2010 =K=
AN DEN LAGERKOMMANDANTEN DES KL. AUSCHWITZ.==
FAHRTGENEHMIGUNG FUER EINEN LKW. VON AUSCHWITZ NACH
DESSAU UND ZURUECK ZWECKS ABHOLUNG VON ZYKLON WIRD
HIERMIT FUER DEN 30.7.43 ERTEILT.=
DEM KRAFTFAHRER IST DER SS- SONDERAUSWEIS - K
MITZUGEBEN.=
DER CHEF DER AMTSGRUPPE D, GEZ, GLUECKS
SS- BRIGADEFUEHRER U. GENERALMAJOR DER WAFFEN-SS-++

34

Zyklon gas came to Auschwitz in large quantities. On 30th July 1943, a driver received authorisation to pick up a truckload of the poison in Dessau.

AUSCHWITZ MUSEUM & SCANPIX/AKG-IMAGES

the moment they set foot on the ground, driving them forwards with commands backed up by their barking dogs and sticks. Prisoners who reacted too slowly were executed.

The method worked. The arrivals quickly gathered in two rows. Men in one, women and children in the other. The snake of people then moved quickly towards the 'death ramp', where an SS doctor sorted the new arrivals with a flick of his thumb. The able-bodied – mainly men and women without children – were sent to accommodation in the camp. The rest – the old, sick, young and women with small children – were directed to the gas chamber.

Death came from below

Despite what Höss thought, the gassings proved brutal. Too many people were crammed into the chambers – usually women and children first – and when the room was packed, the SS guards herded another 20-30 strong, male Jews into the chambers. They drove the men into the overcrowded room with the usual combination of noise and brute force until the victims were packed so close together that the weakest had already died from lack of air.

Shlomo Venezia, a Greek member of the Sonderkommando – Jewish prisoners assigned to remove the bodies after the execution – recounted the moment the doors were bolted shut and panic struck the prisoners:

"You found them gripping each other – everyone had desperately sought a little air. The gas was thrown on to the floor and gave off acid from underneath, so everyone tried to find some air even if each one needed to climb on top of another until the last one died."

After each gassing, Jews like Venezia cleaned the walls of blood and faeces – clear tell-tale traces of the brutal deaths. About two hours after a gassing, the chamber was prepared for another mass execution.

Ovens couldn't burn the bodies

Soon the number of gassings had increased so much that the camp's officers found it difficult to hide what was going on in the gas chamber, which was still located on the camp's main road.

"In order to stifle the screams there were motors," recalled Jósef Paczynski, a Polish prisoner who sneaked over one evening to find out what was going on in the crematoria. "[The SS] had those motorcycles to conceal the yelling, but they failed."

Höss therefore decided to set up temporary gas chambers in two idyllic-looking farmhouses located near the new Birkenau camp. The SS brutally evicted the owners, then fitted the houses with airtight doors and covered windows. The two new gas chambers proved effective, but to Höss's chagrin, another problem now arose. With the increasing number of executions in the ever-increasing number of gas chambers, even Topf & Söhne's crematorium oven could not keep up.

As a result, the SS leadership tried to bury the excess bodies. The task was almost impossible and had to be done so quickly that the Jewish prisoner work units in the Sonderkommando could only just manage to dig graves deep enough to cover the bodies. To speed up decomposition, bodies were sprinkled with powdered lime, but the efforts proved futile. In the summer heat, the stench given off by the corpses spread throughout Auschwitz, much to the displeasure of Heinrich Himmler, who inspected the camp on 17th July 1942.

According to Höss, Himmler failed to mention the problem during the visit »

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

DISPOSAL

“They [the SS] brought them [the bodies] to the holes where I used to work… We put powdered lime and soil over them. Just enough to cover the bodies so no one could see them… [In summer] the dead bodies were becoming alive. They were rotting and coming out of the holes. Blood and dirt was everywhere and we had to take them out with our bare hands. It did not look like a dead body anymore. It was a rotten mass. We had to dig into that mass and sometimes we took out a head, sometimes a hand or a leg. The smell was unbearable”

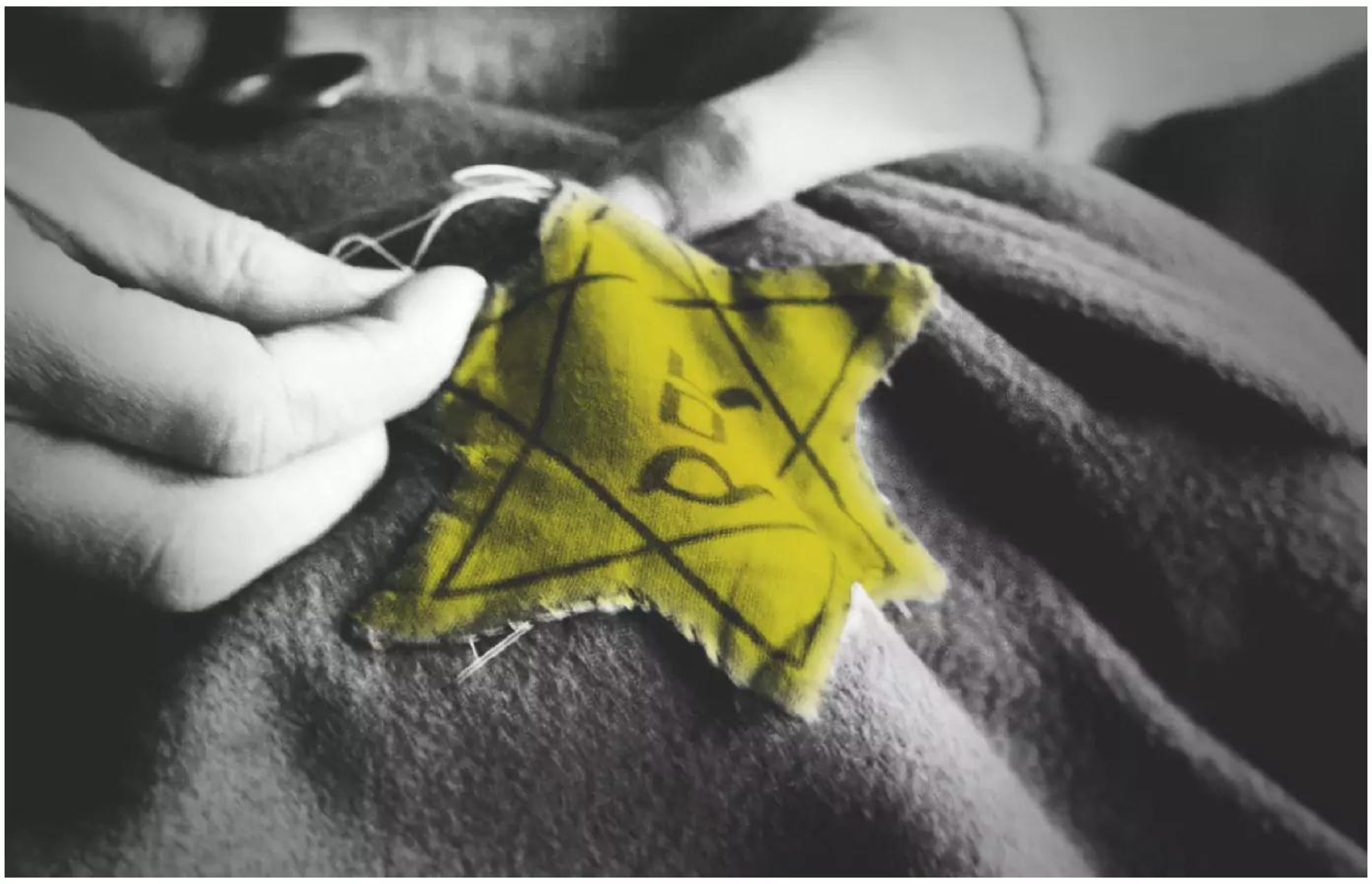
Otto Pressburger, Slovakian Jew, member of the Sonderkommando in Auschwitz

“A big fire was made here with wood and petrol and we were throwing them right into it. There were always two of us – one holding the legs and one on the arms. The smell and stench was terrible… The SS men were constantly drinking vodka or cognac… They couldn’t cope with it either”

Otto Pressburger on how he helped burn the bodies on bonfires due to lack of capacity

“We threw them in the flames. And then we heard some kind of screaming – the first one didn’t get a bullet, but fell down unconscious”

Morris Venezia, Greek Jew, after the shooting of three Hungarian Jews, who were then thrown into the crematorium oven



STEVE ALLEN TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY/IMAGESELECT

During the Nazi regime, all Jews were forced to wear a Jewish star on their clothing so they could be recognised. The star was typically yellow, but the design varied from country to country.

itself, but the Reichsführer had barely returned home before he dispatched his problem solver, Standartenführer Paul Blöbel, to Auschwitz.

Eastern Front veteran took control

Blöbel had a bloody career behind him. After a stint in the security service, he was sent to the Eastern Front as a leader in an Einsatzgruppen unit. There he’d achieved both honour and fame among senior SS commanders when he organised the shooting of almost 34,000 Jews in the Babi Jar gorge in Ukraine in September 1941. Blöbel had also masterminded Himmler’s attempt to kill prisoners by blowing them up. Four months after the Babi Jar massacre, he had been discharged due to alcoholism, but his experience on the Eastern Front was still valuable to the regime. Now Himmler ordered him to pass on his skills to the Auschwitz guards.

In Birkenau, Blöbel showed how bodies in mass graves burned better by stacking the dead bodies between layers of firewood and railway tracks. For fuel, the cynical Blöbel recommended petrol or methanol, which was sprinkled over the top layer of corpses. But Blöbel’s methods didn’t stop there, for the veteran of the Eastern Front was terrifying in his efficiency.

“The ditches sloped down, so that, as they burned, the bodies discharged a flow of human fat down the ditch to a corner where a sort of basin had been formed to collect it,” Shlomo Venezia from the Sonderkommando later explained. When the flames threatened to go out, workers from the unit would take some of the fat in the vat and throw it on the funeral pyre so that the fire would flare up again.

Blöbel also took Höss on a field trip to the Chelmno extermination camp near Lodz, where the camp commandant was shown the crematorium and a human-sized grinder that could crush the remaining bones.

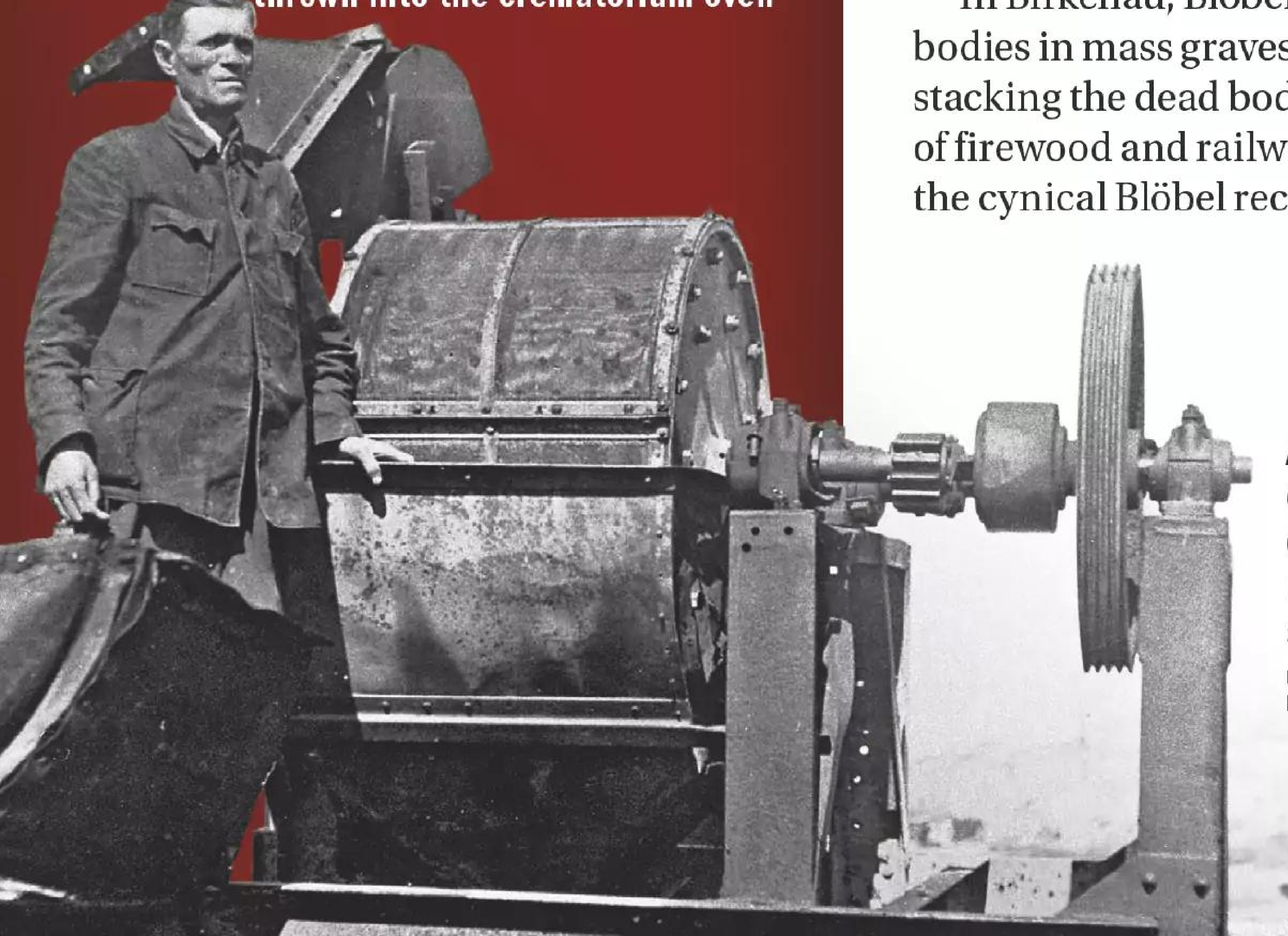
Army complained about burnings

Despite the new methods, Höss soon concluded that open burning was not the solution to his problem:

“During bad weather or when a strong wind was blowing, the stench of burning flesh was carried for many miles and caused the entire area to talk about the burning of Jews,” Höss later explained.

More importantly, the camp also received complaints from the army, who pointed out that the glowing pyres could act as beacons for enemy pilots at night.

Topf & Söhne was therefore summoned to Auschwitz again for a



At first, the SS experimented with destroying remains using a human-sized bone crusher.

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

planning meeting, and throughout the autumn, senior camp officials, architects and the furnace company worked on sketches for new crematoria that could burn the many Jewish bodies.

Initially, the new buildings were likely to serve only as crematoria. But soon the camp's officers realised that Birkenau also needed efficient gas chambers and decided to place them in the same building as the new crematoria.

Originally, the morgue doors opened inwards – a solution that would make it impossible to open them to the stuffed gas chambers. Consequently, the doors were changed to open outwards. At the same time, the architects cancelled a planned chute for dragging bodies down into the basement and replaced it with a staircase that the condemned could use on their way to the gas chamber.

Throughout the winter, architects and construction managers worked hard to get even the smallest details of the new extermination machine right. One of the biggest problems was that the Zyklon B granules vaporised best at 27° C. Furnace salesman Prüfer therefore personally developed a pipe system that used excess furnace heat to heat the gas chambers to the right temperature. But the experiment was quickly cancelled because the heat from the ovens overwhelmed the ventilation ducts.

Apart from these shortcomings, the ghastly euthanasia facility lived up to the camp's requirements. Karl Schultze, a representative of Topf & Söhne – who also supplied ventilation systems for Auschwitz – saw this for himself when the new gas chambers were put into operation in March 1943.

"Just as expected, a prisoner transport arrived at the camp on Saturday, and on the same day I checked with Bischoff how the blowers and fans in the gas chamber were working," said Schultze. For this purpose, around 150-300 newly arrived prisoners were driven into the chambers and gassed.

"An SS man switched on the ventilation systems, with the help of which the contaminated air was extracted and fresh air blown in. During this test, I was able to establish that both the fans and the ventilation system worked perfectly," Schultze recounted, seemingly unaffected by the grim reality of what his systems were doing.

150,000 gassings per month

After a series of test gassings, four new crematoria with gas chambers were completed in the summer of 1943. The buildings were built in red brick and placed on the outskirts of the Birkenau camp. Crematoria II and III were equipped with five large ovens, each with three oven doors, while the smaller crematoria IV and V each had one large oven with eight doors. To streamline the process, bodies were transported up from the gas chambers in the basement by a hoisting mechanism.

In total, the new crematoria in Birkenau had the capacity to murder and destroy 4,700 people every single day. Together with the first gas

»

DRAWINGS KEPT MEMORIES ALIVE

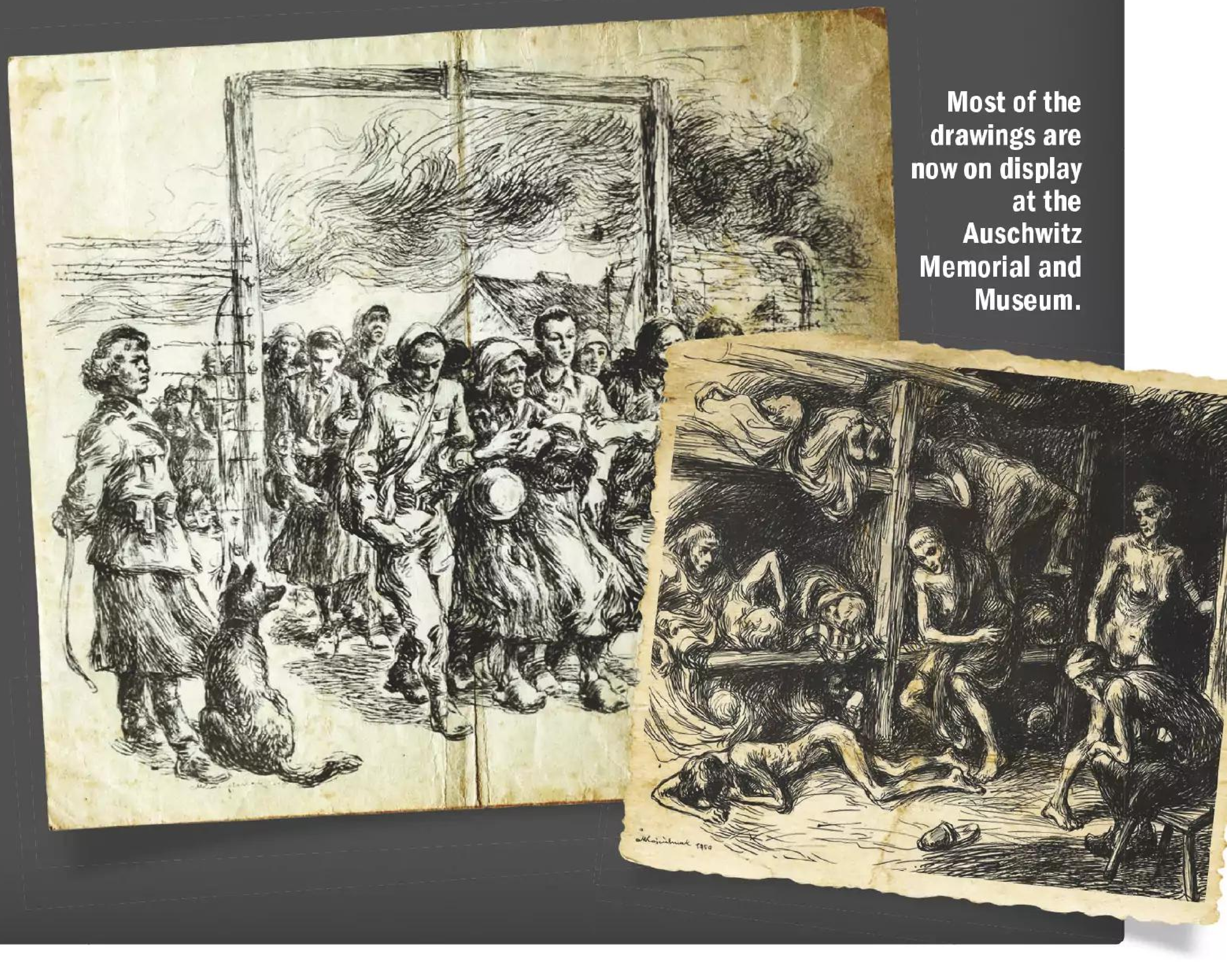
Jewish artists produced drawings of the prisoners' harsh everyday life in the camp. The illustrations were smuggled out or hidden under buildings as a damning testimony for posterity.

The camp's officials often ordered prisoners to paint portraits of guards and pictures of the landscape near Auschwitz, among other things. In this way, a number of Jewish artists gained access to paper, pencils and even oils.

The artists secretly portrayed life in Auschwitz – from the prisoners' daily march back to the camp, accompanied by the camp's bizarre prisoners' orchestra, to death in the crowded barracks.

In total, up to a few hundred sketches were drawn in Auschwitz – many of them by artists who probably didn't survive their stay in the camp. For example, no one knows who made the 22 sketches that were found hidden under the infirmary barracks in Birkenau in 1947. The drawings were rolled up in a bottle and are all simply signed with the initials MM.

The limited number of photographs depicting life in the extermination camp makes the drawings one of the most important testimonies of everyday life behind the electric barbed wire fences.



Most of the drawings are now on display at the Auschwitz Memorial and Museum.

ULLSTEIN BILD & SCALA/BPK

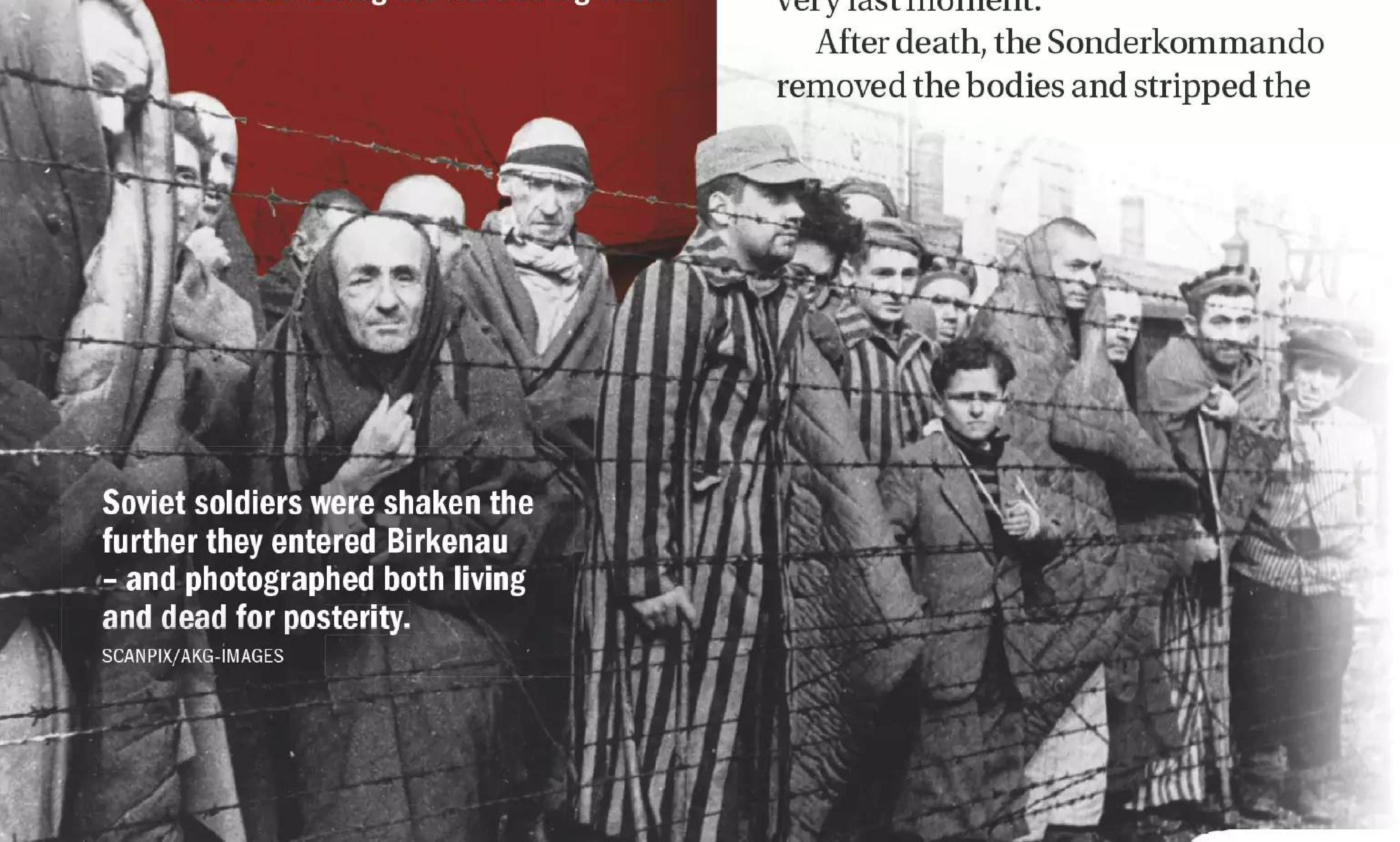
■ EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

LIBERATION

> “They began rushing towards us, in a big crowd. They were weeping, embracing us, and kissing us. I felt a grievance on behalf of mankind that these fascists had made such a mockery of us. It roused me and all the soldiers to go and quickly destroy them and send them to hell”
>
> Vasily Gromadsky, Soviet officer in the 60th Army who helped liberate Auschwitz

> “We ran up to them and they gave us hugs, cookies and chocolates. Being so alone, a hug meant more than anybody could imagine because that provided the human warmth we were starving for. We were not only starved for food but we were starved for human kindness”
>
> Eva Moses Kor, Jewish prisoner, 10 years old when liberated

> “A ghastly sight arose before our eyes: a vast number of barracks (in Birkenau) ... People lay in bunks inside many of them. They were skeletons clad in skin, with vacant gazes... They were suffering from starvation, and they were exhausted and sick”
>
> Aleksandr Vorontsov, photographer and captain in the Red Army. Vorontsov’s film of the liberation of Auschwitz was used as evidence during the Nuremberg Trials



Soviet soldiers were shaken the further they entered Birkenau – and photographed both living and dead for posterity.

SCANPIX/AKG-IMAGES

chamber in the Auschwitz main camp, the death factory reached an extermination capacity of 150,000 people per month.

An eerie efficiency characterised the entire death process, from the moment the victims took their first steps down the wide staircase to the undressing rooms in the basement. Members of the Sonderkommando were tasked with telling the victims that they needed a shower. At this late stage, even the Jewish penal labourers did not want to frighten their compatriots.

Death was inevitable, so the Sonderkommando reassured the new arrivals with promises that they really would have to take a bath and that a warm meal was waiting afterwards. Despite the rumours and suspicions, the words of their compatriots probably contributed to the fact that the victims almost always entered the gas chambers voluntarily. Sonderkommando members also reported that mothers with children were often the first to enter the gas chambers, perhaps because they knew what was waiting and wanted death to come quickly.

To reinforce the illusion, there were numbered coat hooks and signs in the undressing rooms saying “To the showers” or “For disinfection”.

“After undressing, the Jews went into the gas chamber, which was furnished with showers and water pipes and gave a realistic impression of a bathhouse,” Höss added. “This part of the operation nearly always went smoothly since the Sonderkommando would always calm those who showed any anxiety... As an additional precaution, the Sonderkommando and an SS soldier always stayed in the chamber until the very last moment.”

After death, the Sonderkommando removed the bodies and stripped the victims of anything that could be reused: jewellery, dentures, dental gold – even the women’s hair. Morris Venezia, a Greek Jew, remembers the macabre sight of stacked bodies that he was told to cut with what looked like shears.

“They looked like sardines in a can!” he remembers. The hair was washed and left to dry on the ceiling above the crematorium ovens. It was then sent to Germany to be sewn into blankets, quilts and other similar items.

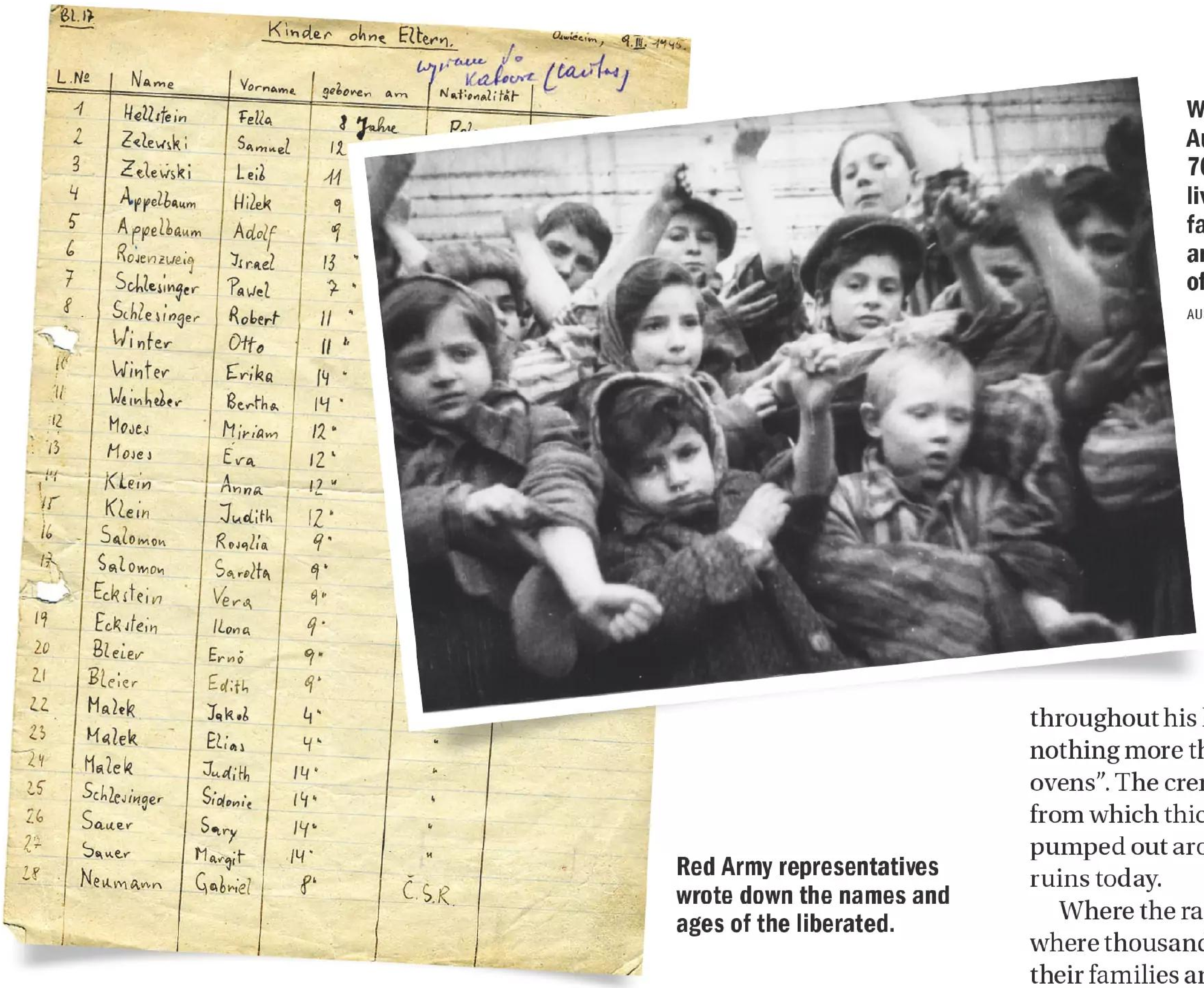
Hungary’s Jews went to their deaths

By 1944, it was plain to see in which direction the war was headed: from the east, the Red Army was smashing through the German ranks, and in the west, it was only a matter of time before the Allies pushed the Germans back towards Berlin.

> “After undressing, the Jews went into the gas chamber, which was furnished with showers and water pipes and gave a realistic impression of a bathhouse”
>
> RUDOLF HÖSS

The Hungarian government, which had supported Nazi Germany throughout the war, began to waver and Hitler decided that the time had come for Hungary’s 760,000 Jews to be exterminated, too. Up to this point, the railway tracks had ended about half a kilometre from Birkenau’s main entrance. There, at the *Altejudenrampe* (old Jewish ramp), the Jews had been sorted and marched or taken on lorries to the gas chambers.

To make exterminations even more efficient, the Germans extended the tracks so they now ended in the centre of Birkenau. From the new sorting ramp, the condemned only had to walk a few hundred metres to the crematoria, a manageable distance for anyone sent to be killed. Gas chambers



Bl. 17

Kinder ohne Eltern.

Oświęcim, 9.III.1945.

wysłane do Katowic (caritas)

L.№	Name	Vorname	geboren am	Nationalität
1	Hellstein	Fella	8 Jahre	Po
2	Zelewski	Samuel	12	
3	Zelewski	Leib	11	
4	Appelbaum	Hilek	9	
5	Appelbaum	Adolf	9	
6	Rosenzweig	Israel	13 "	
7	Schlesinger	Pawel	7 "	
8	Schlesinger	Robert	11 "	
	Winter	Otto	11 "	
10	Winter	Erika	14 "	
11	Weinheber	Bertha	14 "	
12	Moses	Miriam	12 "	
13	Moses	Éva	12 "	
14	Klein	Anna	12 "	
15	Klein	Judith	12 "	
16	Salomon	Rosalia	9 "	
17	Salomon	Sarolta	9 "	
	Eckstein	Vera	9 "	
19	Eckstein	Ilona	9 "	
20	Bleier	Ernö	9 "	
21	Bleier	Edith	9 "	
22	Malek	Jakob	4 "	
23	Malek	Elias	4 "	"
24	Malek	Judith	14 "	"
25	Schlesinger	Sidonie	14 "	"
26	Sauer	Sary	14 "	"
27	Sauer	Margit	14 "	"
28	Neumann	Gabriel	8 "	Č.S.R.

When the Red Army entered Auschwitz, they liberated 700 children who had been living in hiding in the death factory. Today, many of them are among the last survivors of the extermination camp.

AUSCHWITZ MUSEUM

Red Army representatives wrote down the names and ages of the liberated.

and crematoria worked at full speed throughout the summer of 1944.

Even so, the gas chambers were sometimes full when a transport arrived. In those cases, the SS ordered the Jews to wait in a shady birch grove – in full view of Birkenau's smoking, fire-spitting crematorium chimneys.

Of the approximately 440,000 Hungarian Jews who arrived in the summer of 1944, at least 320,000 were sent directly to the gas chamber.

Nazis wanted to save the machine

As the gassings escalated, testimonies of Nazi atrocities began to leak out. At the same time, gunfire from the east announced that the end was near – both for Germany and for Auschwitz. For the last time, Topf & Söhne was called in, this time to dismantle the parts of the crematoria and gas chambers that the SS hoped could be reused in other camps at a safe distance from the Red Army.

After all precious equipment was removed, the Nazis blew up the buildings to remove all traces. The majority of the remaining prisoners were put on trains bound for other camps or sent on regular death marches across bitterly cold Poland. When the Red Army arrived at Auschwitz camp on 27th January 1945, they found around 7,000 survivors, all in a sorry state – starving, filthy and infested with lice.

For the Soviets, the liberation of Auschwitz became one of their darkest memories: "They neither greeted us, nor smiled," Primo Levi, an Italian Jew, recalled of the Red Army's soldiers. "It was that shame ... that the just man experiences at another man's crime."

Höss was hanged

On 16th April 1947, Rudolf Höss was hanged outside his commandant's residence. The former commander of Auschwitz walked to the scaffold with no sign of remorse – erect and without uttering a word. The same lack of guilt was evident in Topf & Söhne's salesman Kurt Prüfer. Faced with a Soviet commission of inquiry, he admitted his involvement in the construction of the extermination facilities but showed no regret. He was found guilty of "crimes against the civilian population and captive members of the Red Army" and sentenced to 25 years' hard labour in Siberia. There he died in 1955. Faced with the prospect of being arrested, Ludwig Topf chose to end his life. On 30th May 1945, he took cyanide after stating in a farewell letter: "I was ever decent – the very opposite of a Nazi – the whole world knows that." Ernst-Wolfgang Topf was never brought to trial. He maintained throughout his life that he had done nothing more than sell "innocent ovens". The crematoria at Auschwitz, from which thick black smoke and ash pumped out around the clock, lie in ruins today.

Where the railway tracks ended – where thousands of Jews were torn from their families and sent to their deaths with the flick of a thumb – stands a simple memorial. Naturally, the atrocities haunted the survivors for the rest of their lives. Greek Jew Shlomo Venezia, one of the few to recount his experiences in the Sonderkommando, admitted: "Life. Since then I've never had a normal life ... Everything takes me back to the camp ... It's as if the 'work' I was forced to do there had never really left my head ... Nobody ever really gets out of the Crematorium." ■

DPA/POLFOTO

Rudolf Höss apologised to the Polish people before he was hanged.

Witold Pilecki was a war hero with extensive experience working with the resistance. This served him well during his 945 days in Auschwitz.

MEMORIAL AND MUSEUM AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU & GETTY IMAGES & ULLSTEIN BILD

POLISH RESISTANCE FIGHTER VOLUNTARILY WENT TO HELL

In 1940, Witold Pilecki volunteered to be interned in Auschwitz concentration camp. He planned to organise Polish resistance in the camp. Upon arrival, however, Pilecki realised that Auschwitz was not a regular prison camp.

By Jan Ingar Thon

It was morning in Warsaw, September 1940. The pavements were full of people on their way to work, and in the streets the trams rattled past. Suddenly, a column of German trucks screeched to a halt. Iron-soled boots clattered on the cobblestones as the grey-clad soldiers jumped out. Terrified Poles fled in panic into the side streets.

But one man made no attempt to escape. Instead, he calmly made his way through the stream of fleeing people and walked towards the soldiers. He stopped in front of a German patrol. The German officer bellowed "Papers!" Calmly, the Pole took out his identification papers. They showed that his name was Tomasz Serafinski and that he was wanted by the Germans. Minutes later, he lay bruised and tied up in one of the lorries on his way to captivity.

The prisoner harboured a huge secret: the papers were not his. The real Tomasz Serafinski was a Polish resistance fighter operating in another part of the country. But because Serafinski was wanted by the Germans, the prisoner had used his papers to get himself arrested. The prisoner's real name was Witold Pilecki: cavalry officer, leader in the Polish resistance army and on one of World War II's most remarkable missions.

The Polish underground had discovered that the German occupying forces had set up a new prison camp for Polish officers and resistance fighters. Pilecki had suggested to his superiors that he infiltrate the camp to gather information and organise a resistance movement among the inmates. The area where the camp was located was isolated and heavily guarded, and Pilecki realised he had only one option: get arrested and be sent there. The camp to which Pilecki was headed was named after the nearby Polish town of Oswiecim. But it was better known by its German name: Auschwitz.

Welcome to hell

Pilecki was a veteran of both World War I and the German invasion from the previous year, and was now a seasoned member of the Polish resistance

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movement. He believed he was prepared for anything. But during the transport to Auschwitz, he quickly realised that this was unlike anything he'd experienced in his 39 years. Pilecki and a large group of other prisoners had been sent by train to the prison camp. During the march from the station to the camp itself, the German guards suddenly ordered one of the prisoners to run across the ground. A moment later, the prisoner lay dead, shot in the back. Ten other prisoners were then picked out and shot as punishment for the "escape attempt". Then the German soldiers unleashed their dogs on the bodies, roaring with laughter. Pilecki realised that you were sent to Auschwitz for only one reason: to die.

In 1940, Auschwitz was not yet a death camp in the true sense of the word. The industrial killing machine with gas chambers had not yet been put into operation. Yet only a minority of those who passed through the gates inscribed *Arbeit Macht Frei* (Work Makes One Free) came out alive. The first prisoners at Auschwitz were political prisoners who were forced to work as slave labourers until they dropped dead. The concentration camp was set up in old military barracks from the previous century. It was surrounded by marshland and shrouded in an almost constant fog. Autumn and winter are bitterly cold in southern Poland, and the harsh climate and perpetual mist made things even worse.

> "My name is Maximilian Kolbe. He has a wife and family. I am alone. I am a Catholic priest."
>
> MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

At times, prisoners had to sleep on the cold stone floor, and disease claimed the lives of countless inmates. Others died through hunger, exhaustion and indiscriminate torture. Many were also executed, as even the slightest offence was ruthlessly dealt with in Auschwitz.

The worst offence of all was trying to escape. Escape attempts almost always resulted in collective punishment. Prisoners could be forced to stand upright in rows for hours on end, or prison guards would pick out prisoners at random for execution. One of the Germans' favourite methods was to send the selected prisoners to the 'bunker', where one or more inmates were put in a tiny concrete cell that was too low for them to stand upright, but also too narrow for them to sit or lie down. Here the Germans kept the prisoners locked up until they died of hunger or thirst.

Priest saved family father

One day, the Germans discovered that a prisoner had disappeared. As usual, the guards selected men to be sent to the bunker as punishment. One of them, Franciszek Gajowniczek, hid his face in his hands and groaned:

"My wife! My children! I will never see them again."

A small, thin man stepped forward and introduced himself as Maximilian Kolbe. "He has a wife and family. I am alone. I am a Catholic priest," he said, offering to die in his place.

Kolbe got what he wanted, and along with nine others, was locked up to die. For three weeks, Kolbe held out. Finally, one of the camp doctors took pity on the brave priest and gave him a lethal injection of carbolic acid. The prisoner who Kolbe saved survived Auschwitz. Shortly before his death in 1995, Gajowniczek visited the United States.

"So long as he ... has breath in his lungs he would consider it his duty to tell people about the heroic act of love of St Maximilian Kolbe," a chaplain who met with Gajowniczek said.

Pilecki himself also came close to losing his life just over a month after arriving in Auschwitz. When the prisoners were lined up for inspection on the morning of 28th October 1940, the guards again discovered that one inmate was missing. As collective punishment, the others were ordered to line up. From 12.00 until 21.00, the prisoners stood on the parade ground, exposed to the sleet, icy cold wind and fog from Auschwitz's marshes.

By the end of the day, hundreds of prisoners lay dead in the campsite. Pilecki only survived thanks to a friend who worked in the camp's infirmary who was able to give him medicine and extra food. Pilecki survived and was filled with renewed vigour for resistance work. He realised how important friends in the right places were. And not least, how important the infirmary was

THE FREEDOM FIGHTER

The Pilecki family had a long tradition of fighting fiercely for Poland's freedom. Witold Pilecki's grandfather had participated in the Polish uprising against Russia in 1863 and was exiled with his family. Pilecki himself was born in 1901 and at the age of 18 took part in his first war when the newly independent Poland was attacked by the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in 1919. He organised guerrilla operations behind Soviet lines and took part in several of its biggest battles. He was twice awarded the Cross of Valour for bravery.

When Germany invaded in 1939, Pilecki again fought on the front line. Poland surrendered in October 1939, but Pilecki continued to fight underground. He co-founded the Secret Polish Army and was responsible for the resistance's organisation. Under his leadership, the movement quickly grew to 8,000 men in several of Poland's largest cities.

Witold Pilecki would live and die fighting for his beloved Poland.

ARCHIVE PL/ALAMY/IMAGESELECT

Auschwitz began as a labour camp with around 15,000 Polish prisoners of war. Soon the Germans decided that the camp would also house tens of thousands of Jews.

SHUTTERSTOCK

for the prisoners' welfare. With this knowledge, Pilecki began to build his secret army in the shadow of the crematorium chimneys.

The secret army of Auschwitz

Pilecki's army in Auschwitz was named the *Zwiqzek Organizacji Wojskowej* (Union of Military Organisations), or ZOW. Pilecki was extremely thorough and careful when recruiting for it. He organised the movement into cells, each containing five men he could trust. To minimise the ZOW's risk of exposure, no one knew who was in the other cells – they only knew about Pilecki himself. Each five-man cell was then tasked with recruiting five others they trusted implicitly, and so the organisation grew like a pyramid.

The biggest challenge for Pilecki, however, was to unite the Polish prisoners across political divides. Auschwitz's inmates came in all political colours – socialists, monarchists, democrats and right-wing radicals. The only thing they had in common was a shared hatred of the enemy. But with his personality, persuasiveness and charm, Pilecki managed to get the Poles to settle their political differences. Those who met Pilecki described him as a friendly, modest and slightly shy man. He was not at all what you would expect from a war hero and resistance fighter who'd volunteered to be sent to Auschwitz. But it was probably for this very reason that Pilecki managed to reconcile and unite the prisoners in the camp.

One of the first members of ZOW was Dr Wodyslaw Dering. When Dering was admitted to the infirmary, the Germans realised that he was medically trained and appointed him chief physician. This was ZOW's first contact in what would become the nerve centre of Pilecki's resistance network.

The infirmary was a place that most entered sooner or later, and where the invisible threads of Pilecki's network intersected. It therefore became a centre for intelligence and planning. But the department was important for other reasons, too. Auschwitz was riddled with corruption and bribery, built on a system of favours and kickbacks. The guards were also part of this system, not least the kapos. They were prisoners themselves, appointed by the Germans as guards and overseers. Because of its influence in the infirmary, ZOW was able to offer the kapos essential medicine and medical care. In return, the kapos used their influence to provide ZOW with food,

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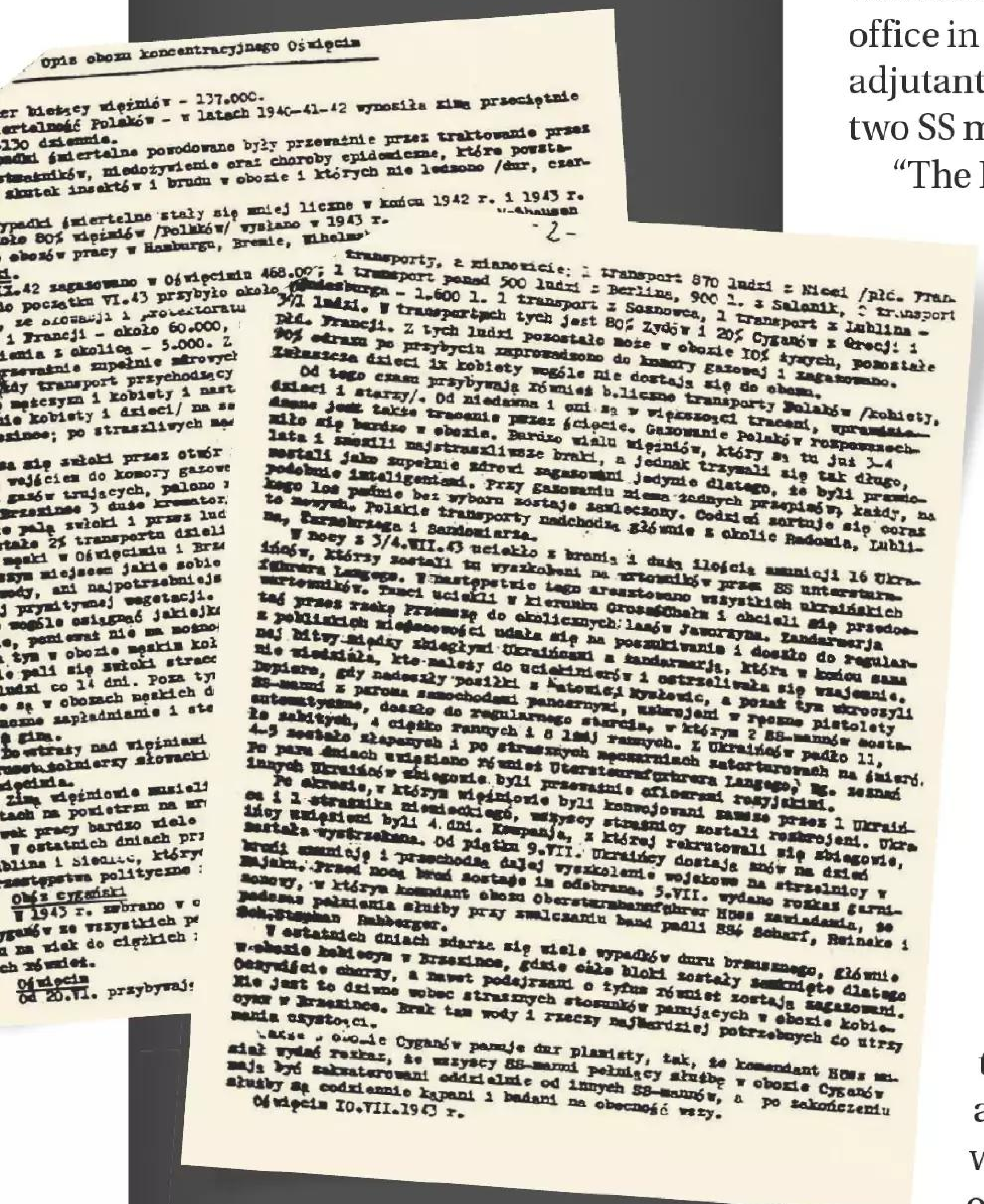
THE WEST IGNORED PILECKI

Throughout his captivity, Pilecki reported on conditions in Auschwitz. The reports were smuggled out and forwarded to the Polish government-in-exile in London, which informed the Western powers. However, despite becoming aware of the conditions in Auschwitz, the Allies never intervened.

Pilecki repeatedly asked for air strikes against the camp, but they never materialised. Poland was considered within the Soviet sphere of interest, and the Western powers were afraid of offending their allies. But above all, the reports were thought to be exaggerated. Before the liberation of the death camps in 1945, the world was unable to imagine such atrocities.

However, during the war crime trials, Pilecki's reports were crucial evidence and helped convict several of the worst Nazi executioners.



During his captivity in Auschwitz, Pilecki wrote several reports that were smuggled out of the camp.

clothing and other supplies. They also helped get ZOW members work where Pilecki wanted them placed.

Himmler's new death camp

Heinrich Himmler looked out over the misty and marshy plains around Auschwitz. Behind him, a group of officers stood silent and waiting. All were intimidated by the mighty SS leader. Then he presented his plan. Auschwitz would be expanded to accommodate a total of 30,000 prisoners. And at the village of Birkenau, three kilometres from Auschwitz, Himmler wanted a new camp with room for 100,000 prisoners.

The local governor, Fritz Bracht, tried to protest. There wasn't enough clean water in the area, the marsh hadn't been drained, and it was impossible to get enough timber, bricks and cement, he claimed. Himmler looked coldly at Bracht and the other officers.

"Gentlemen, this project will be completed; my reasons for this are more important than your objections!"

A few weeks later, the Auschwitz camp commandant, Rudolf Höss, was hastily summoned to Himmler's office in Berlin. Himmler ordered his adjutants to leave the room so that the two SS men could talk undisturbed.

"The Führer has ordered the Final Solution of the Jewish question," he said. We the SS have to carry out this order. The existing extermination sites in the East are not in a position to carry out these intended operations on a large scale. I have, therefore, chosen Auschwitz for this purpose."

Not long after, the first experiment with poison gas was conducted at Auschwitz, and by winter 1942, construction of the new camp – Auschwitz-Birkenau – was in full swing.

It was a huge project with thousands of forced labourers, and even though the new camp was a few kilometres from the old camp where Pilecki was staying, it was impossible for the veteran not to notice what was going on. It was obvious that something new, big and alarming was being constructed.

Pilecki realised that he had to get one of his men into the death camp if he wanted to know more about it.

On 2nd April 1942, one of Pilecki's most trusted men, Jan Karcz, was brought in for interrogation by the German secret police Gestapo. After nine days of continuous torture and interrogation, he was sent back to the prison barracks. Barely able to stand, he said to Pilecki: "Congratulate me, they've let me out. They wanted to know whether there was any organisation in the camp… Don't worry, I haven't said a word. I'll tell you the rest tomorrow."

> **"The Führer has ordered the Final Solution of the Jewish question. We the SS have to carry out this order."**
>
> HEINRICH HIMMLER

But Karcz never got the chance to tell the rest of the story. The next day he was sent to Birkenau. By sheer coincidence, Pilecki had achieved exactly what he wanted: a trusted ZOW agent who could report to him from the death camp. Soon after, Karcz began smuggling one horrifying report after another from inside the death camp to Pilecki in the old camp. With each new report, Pilecki realised that it was now more important than ever to pass on the information to the outside world. And for that, he needed both a reliable and efficient means of communication.

Radio from Auschwitz

One evening, Pilecki walked briskly towards his friend Konstanty Piekarski. It was clear that he had something important on his mind. Kon worked as a potato peeler in the camp's kitchen, but now Pilecki had a very special task for him. Pilecki had heard that a man was needed in the cartography office, where they produced maps for various tasks. Pilecki wanted Kon to take this position. Kon was not particularly keen to give up his comfortable job in the kitchen. He couldn't understand what he was doing in the cartography office either.

"You're the only one I can trust," Pilecki explained, "and you also can draw maps. I'm not good as a draughtsman, but both of us would have to pass for professional cartographers for at least a week. In the building where we work is stored electronic equipment for radio communication."

Pilecki's plan was to build a radio transmitter right under the Germans' noses. Kon thought it all seemed completely crazy at first, but as so often before, Pilecki managed to persuade those who doubted his plans. On Monday morning, Kon and Pilecki arrived at their new job at the cartography office.

While Kon worked on the maps, Pilecki spent most of his time in the bathroom, making plans with a contact he had in the radio equipment department. Two days later, an excited Pilecki entered the map room and whispered to Kon that the radio was finished. But there was still one big problem: how were they going to smuggle the radio transmitter out of the map room and into the prison barracks?

Pilecki had hidden the transmitter on top of the toilet's water cistern, but it would probably not be long before it was discovered. Kon sneaked away to see if he could find a solution. In the corridor outside the toilet, he found a cupboard full of paper, pencils, ink and cards. He pushed it all aside, placing the radio on the top shelf of the cupboard. But this hiding place couldn't be kept secret for long either. They had to get the radio out – and they had to do it quickly.

Suddenly, Pilecki thought of Alex and Alfred, two ZOW members who worked transporting bodies from the infirmary. The Germans didn't like to inspect the hearse, so this was their opportunity. Pilecki arranged with the two men to meet in the square outside the cartography office, where they would hide the radio in the hearse.

But they still had to get the radio out of the cupboard where it was hidden. Pilecki had a suggestion: "I'll pretend that I have diarrhoea and will go to the toilet every 15 to 20 minutes. During one of those trips you will start performing your magic tricks for everybody. Get the guard sufficiently involved to keep him away from the door... I grab [the radio], take it to the washroom, place it outside the open window, then return here. All you have do is jump from the window, run like hell to the garbage, dump the radio there and run back."

Kon agreed to the proposal, and although he was close to being discovered by an SS patrol, he had the radio placed in the agreed location. Later that day, Pilecki asked permission to visit the infirmary to "get something for »

ULLSTEIN BILD

The leader of the SS, Heinrich Himmler (standing over the table), ordered the construction of Auschwitz II death camp in 1941.

the diarrhoea". There he informed Alex and Alfred, and that evening the radio was in place in the camp.

The radio operated for six months. For the prisoners, it represented a victory over the hated SS. However, it wasn't long before the guards picked up the transmissions and began searching for the radio. But even though they tore up the floorboards, knocked down walls and searched every inch of the camp, they couldn't find it. Frustration began to build, and more than one SS man thought he could see secret smiles on the prisoners' faces. But eventually Pilecki decided it had become too dangerous, and the radio was dismantled. Once more, ZOW was left without contact with the outside world. But yet again, chance and Pilecki's ingenuity would come to their aid.

Pilecki organised escape

The highlight of Witold Pilecki's work in Auschwitz came in June 1942. Until then, ZOW had dismissed any thought of escape. Such attempts always resulted in collective punishment. Therefore, ZOW saw it as a selfish act.

But in 1941, the Germans began their offensive against the Soviet Union, and the German war industry needed all the labour it could get its hands on. Collective punishment of prisoners in labour camps was subsequently prohibited because it deprived Germany of useful workers. And it didn't take long for Witold Pilecki to capitalise on the situation.

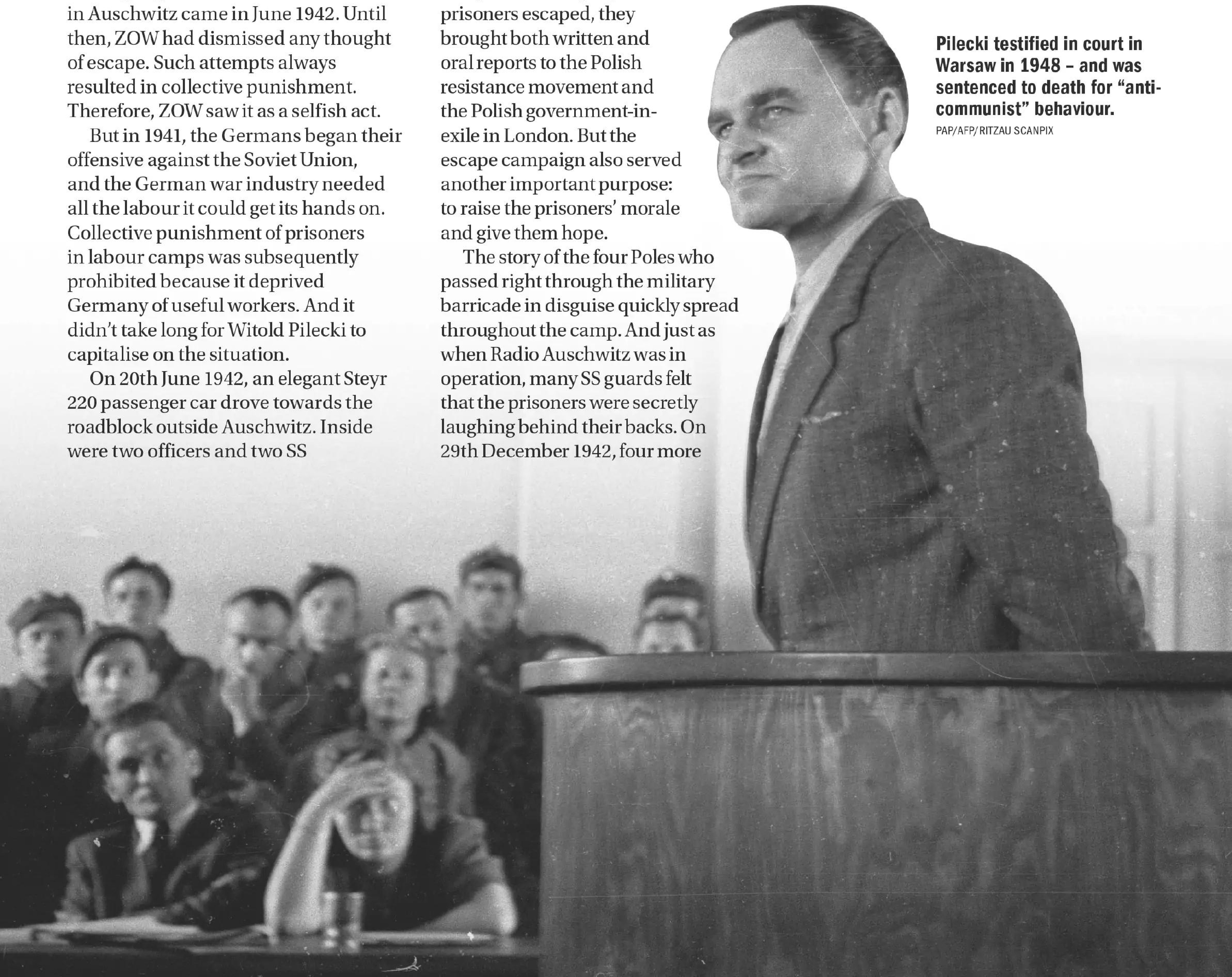
On 20th June 1942, an elegant Steyr 220 passenger car drove towards the roadblock outside Auschwitz. Inside were two officers and two SS commanders. As they approached the checkpoint, the guard stood to attention, raised the barrier and gave a Nazi salute. The SS officers returned the salute, drove quickly through the streets of Oswiecim, crossed the bridge over the river Sola and disappeared. Later that evening, there was a great commotion among the guards when they counted the prisoners. It turned out that four Poles were missing. Shortly afterwards, a breathless SS guard ran in to say that someone had stolen four SS uniforms. Suddenly, SS Captain Kreuzman also came running, screaming that someone had stolen his car – a Steyr 220. Slowly, excitement spread among the lined-up prisoners. Even though it was dangerous, they began to send each other sideways glances and some had to fight to hold back their laughter.

Like Pilecki's other actions, the escapes had two purposes. When prisoners escaped, they brought both written and oral reports to the Polish resistance movement and the Polish government-in-exile in London. But the escape campaign also served another important purpose: to raise the prisoners' morale and give them hope.

The story of the four Poles who passed right through the military barricade in disguise quickly spread throughout the camp. And just as when Radio Auschwitz was in operation, many SS guards felt that the prisoners were secretly laughing behind their backs. On 29th December 1942, four more Poles escaped from Auschwitz in disguise. But soon after, news arrived that one of them, Boleslaw Juczabra, had been caught and was being interrogated. Juczabra was not a member of ZOW but knew a lot about what was going on. Pilecki knew it was only a matter of time before he would reveal all. He realised that it was now time to escape himself.

Back to freedom

Witold Pilecki sweated in the heat of the ovens. It wasn't helped by the fact that he was wearing a set of civilian clothes under his prison uniform. Pilecki had chosen the bakery as the starting point for his escape because it was outside the camp area and close to a forest. He had bribed a kapo to work on the night shift with two of his men, and then put his entire underground machinery into action. From the clothing warehouse,



Pilecki testified in court in Warsaw in 1948 – and was sentenced to death for "anti-communist" behaviour.

PAP/AFP/ RITZAU SCANPIX

he had obtained civilian clothes and several hundred dollars. A fellow prisoner gave him the key to the bakery exit, and the infirmary equipped him with a chemical substance to confuse the sniffer dogs. And if all went wrong, he had three vials of lethal hydrocyanic acid. The men had no intention of falling into German hands alive.

The professional bakers quickly realised that Pilecki and his men had never set foot in a bakery before. But they didn't betray them, just glared at the blundering newcomers. The clock passed midnight and the time to escape approached. As the SS guards made their rounds, the three prisoners cut the telephone wire and unlocked the door. They were about to rush into the darkness when they spotted a German soldier through the window. Outside, it had started to rain and the guard had taken refuge in front of the bakery with his girlfriend. The minutes ticked by. At any moment, the other guards could come back and discover the cut phone cord. Finally, the soldier left and Pilecki and the other two slipped out the door. They then rushed across the open area surrounding the bakery. Every moment they expected to be stopped by a shout or a shot. But nothing happened and they reached the edge of the forest, where they hurled themselves to safety between the dark trees. They had survived the first stage of the escape.

After a brisk march through the forest, they came to the Sola river. Here they stripped off their prison garb and threw it into the water. At that moment, a burst of gunfire rang out. The escape had been discovered. It was impossible to swim across the wide river, but they found a bridge further downstream. The escape continued at breakneck speed across the river, but soon they arrived at the Vistula river. On the bank they found a boat, but it was locked with a chain and padlock, and would not budge. In desperation, they tried the key to the bakery door in the padlock. Miraculously, it fitted.

Over the following days, the escape continued. In the forest east of the city of Krakow, they were spotted by a German patrol and fired upon. Pilecki was wounded in the shoulder, but they got away. On the evening of 2nd May 1943, they finally reached the town of Bochnia, where the Polish resistance had a hideout. And soon, in the darkness, they could see the lights of the safe house. The three refugees were safe.

The next day, Pilecki asked to be put in touch with the local resistance. He didn't want to waste any time before rejoining the resistance. A signpost led him to the town of Wisnicz, where he met the commander of the local branch. Pilecki extended his hand and introduced himself, and the commander did the same. For once, Pilecki was speechless. The commandant was Tomasz Serafinski, the man whose identity Witold Pilecki had used during his 945 days in Auschwitz. ■

SCANPIX/REUTERS

After escaping Auschwitz, Pilecki took part in the Warsaw uprising. The German forces took cruel retribution and laid waste to the city. 250,000 Poles lost their lives.

PILECKI WAS SHOT BY THE SOVIETS

After his escape, the hero of Auschwitz managed to survive one of the bloodiest uprisings of the war. Four years later, the Soviets executed him.

After escaping Auschwitz, Pilecki rejoined the resistance and continued the struggle. When the Poles revolted against the German occupation forces in Warsaw in 1944, Pilecki led a resistance group that was involved in some of the uprising's fiercest fighting. For two weeks, Pilecki's men defended one of the city's most vulnerable positions against continuous attacks from superior German forces. The Warsaw Uprising cost the lives of around 250,000 Poles, but Pilecki survived. However, he had to spend the rest of the war back in German captivity.

World War II did not end with freedom for the Poles, but Soviet occupation. In 1946, the Polish government-in-exile realised that hope was lost and ordered the resistance movement to give up the fight. But Pilecki continued anyway. His work included documenting Soviet atrocities against the Polish population. On 8th May 1947, he was arrested. Pilecki was accused of anti-communist activities, sentenced to death and shot on 25th May 1948. His body was dumped in a rubbish dump. Today, a tombstone bearing Pilecki's name stands in Warsaw, but the body of the man who was called "The Bravest of the Brave" was never found.

ś.p.
rtm. ułan
WITOLD PILECKI
1901 - 1948
zginął w więzieniu UB
Twórca ruchu oporu
w Auschwitz
D-ca I komp. Chrobry II
K. AK K. Kom. OOP
WKP K. Oświęc.
MARIA PILECKA
zd. Ostrowska
1906-2002

Witold Pilecki's gravestone stands today in Warsaw.

PIOTR KONIECZNY

Jude
Warschau

JANINA BLEIBERG - JEW FROM POLAND, 16 YEARS OLD.
IN AUSCHWITZ SINCE 30 MAY 1942, SURVIVED.

14 LAT.
DALSZY LOS NIEZNANY.

ANICA GRUDEN U
IN AUSCHWITZ SIN

KAZIMIERZ KOPER - POLE, 14 YEARS OLD.
IN AUSCHWITZ SINCE 5 APRIL 1941, DID NOT SURVIVE.

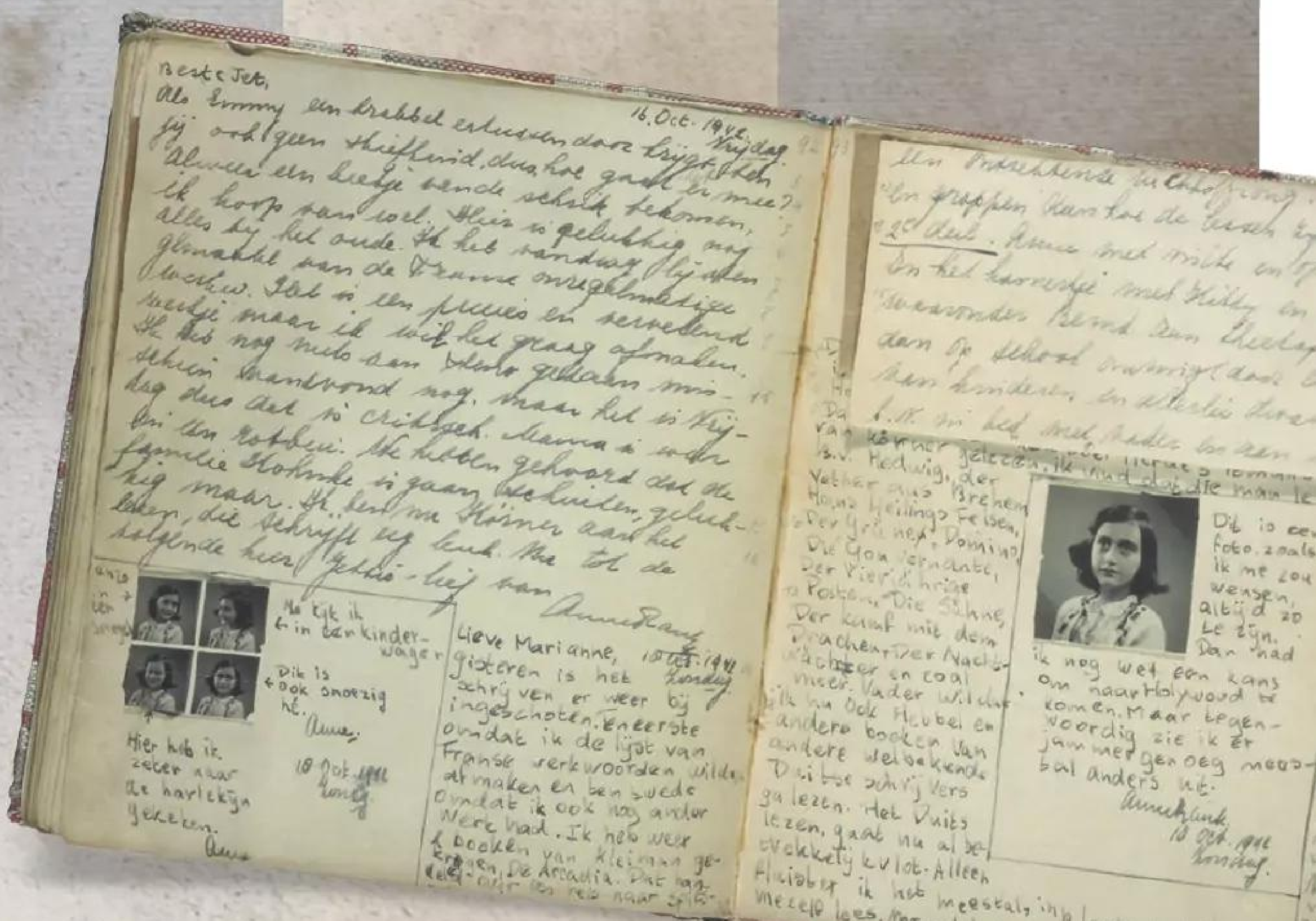
AT.
AŁ 21.03.1942 R.

MOSES POMER
IN AUSCHWITZ

20 cc. size
TYPHUS VACC
ETHER EXTRACTED TYP
Lederle
DOSAGE:

EXECUTIONERS AND VICTIMS

Reinhard Heydrich was determined to find a "final solution" to the "Jewish question". Josef Mengele tortured twins in the name of race. Nazi executioners lined up to outdo each other in cruelty. Meanwhile, the victims fought to survive.



Nu kijk ik
in een kinder-
wagen

Dit is
ook snoezig
hè.
Anne.

18 Oct. 1942
Zondag

Hier heb ik
zeker naar
de harlekijn
gekeken.
Anne

Lieve Marianne, 18 Oct. 1942
gisteren is het Zondag
schrijven er weer bij
ingeschoten. Ten eerste
omdat ik de lijst van
Franse werkwoorden wilde
afmaken en ten tweede
omdat ik ook nog ander
werk had. Ik heb weer
4 boeken van Kleiman ge-
kregen, De Arcadia. Dat han-
delt over een reis naar Spits-

Hedwig, der
Vetter aus Bremen
Hans Heilings Felsen,
Der Grüner, Domino,
Die Gouvernante,
Der Vierjährige
Posten, Die Sühne,
Der Kampf mit dem
Drachen, Der Nacht-
wächter en zoal
meer. Vader wil dat
ik nu ook Hebbel en
andere boeken van
andere welbekende
Duitse schrijvers
ga lezen. Het Duits
lezen, gaat nu al be-
trekkelijk vlot. Alleen
fluister ik het meestal, in plaats dat ik voor
mezelf lees. Maar dat gaat wel over. Gisteren heb

Dit is een
foto, zoals
ik me zou
wensen,
altijd zo
te zijn.
Dan had
ik nog wel een kans
om naar Holywood te
komen. Maar tegen-
woordig zie ik er
jammer genoeg meest-
al anders uit.
AnneFrank.
10 Oct. 1942
Zondag.

DOCUMENT NO-610, PROSECUTION EXHIBIT 41

ANGEL OF DEATH USED PRISONERS AS 'GUINEA PIGS'

Poisonous injections into the eyes, bloody surgeries without anaesthesia, and brutal forced sterilisations – Nazi doctor Josef Mengele turned the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp into his personal laboratory, where children and adults could be tortured to death in the name of science.

By Stine Overbye

As the soldiers swung open the door to the overcrowded cattle wagon, chaos erupted. *"Raus, raus,"* SS officers yelled at the newly arrived prisoners, who stumbled in confusion down on to the station platform at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

For days, they had been crammed together in filthy, stinking cattle wagons, and after the long train journey, the fresh air was a relief. But the prisoners had yet to discover what kind of hell they'd arrived in.

Helplessly, they allowed themselves to be herded into columns, one for men and one for women and children. The guards ordered the columns to march, and slowly the prisoners filed past the camp doctor, Josef Mengele, a well-groomed, dark-haired man dressed in a freshly pressed SS uniform, polished boots, and white gloves. One hand rested on his belt, the other gripped a riding crop, and while he alternated between smiling pleasantly and whistling one of his favourite arias, he pointed with the crop at each individual prisoner; the strong and able-bodied he directed to the right, while the weak or elderly he waved to the left, towards the gas chamber.

Suddenly, the camp doctor spotted a pair of twins in the crowd and his face lit up. Eagerly, he strode over to the two small girls, knelt in front of them, and gently stroked their cheeks. Then, with a snap of his fingers, a guard immediately stepped forward to take the girls away. Another guard dragged off their terrified mother, who was forced in the opposite direction, away from her children.

Then Mengele returned to his work and continued to

Mengele dreamed of a great scientific career but became known as Auschwitz's most brutal executioner.

GYULA CZIMBAL/EPA/RITZAU SCANPIX/
HELEN H. RICHARDSON THE DENVERPOST/GETTY IMAGES

preside over life and death: left, right, left, left…

An hour later, the majority of the prisoners had been burned in the crematorium. The able-bodied faced the prospect of living a little longer as slaves, while those whom Dr Josef Mengele had hand-picked could look forward to a gruesome fate as human guinea pigs. Twins, dwarves, the hunchbacked, the deformed – all faced a life of suffering in Mengele's laboratory.

USHMM/AP/RITZAU SCANPIX

AUGENFARBEN-TAFEL
PROF. Dr. RUD. MARTIN
New York Times
Berlin

Professor Otmar von Verschuer, a racial theory expert, became Mengele's mentor in 1937.

Mengele dreamed of recognition

Even as a boy, Josef Mengele dreamed of securing a place in the history books. His childhood in Bavaria was marked by an endless struggle for the approval of his wealthy parents. In his diaries, Mengele described his father and mother as emotionally cold, and his relationship with his two brothers was tainted by jealousy.

Josef felt that he constantly had to prove his worth, and his childhood friend Julius Diesbach described him as fiercely ambitious: "He didn't just want to succeed but to stand out from the crowd. It was his passion for fame. He once told me that one day I would read his name in the encyclopaedia."

Mengele believed that recognition would come through an esteemed education and a well-paid job as a scientist. After completing his high school diploma in 1930, he decided to move to Munich to study medicine at the university.

At that time, the city was simmering with political unrest. The Nazis were on the rise, and Mengele quickly chose sides: "It was impossible to stand on the sidelines in these politically stirring times, should our Fatherland not succumb to the Marxist-Bolshevik attack," he noted in his diary.

Working for the purity of the breed

During his studies, Mengele became more interested in racial development than in curing diseases. Theories about the purity and superiority of the Aryan race were central to Nazi ideology, and Mengele studied under several of the leading authorities in the field. One of them was Theodor Mollison, who claimed he could determine whether a person had Jewish ancestry just by looking at a photograph. In 1935, Mollison awarded Mengele a doctorate for his dissertation: 'Racial Morphological Research on the Lower Jaw Section of Four Racial Groups'.

The path was now paved for a respectable job. In 1937, Mengele was employed at the Third Reich Institute for Heredity, Biology and Racial Purity at the University of Frankfurt. Here, he was an apprentice under one of Nazi Germany's foremost racial theorists, Professor Otmar von Verschuer, who praised Adolf Hitler as "the first statesman to recognise hereditary biology and race hygiene". At the same

New prisoners were sorted by the camp's doctors immediately upon arrival at Auschwitz.

MEPL/RITZAU SCANPIX

time, Josef Mengele joined the Nazi Party, and shortly afterwards also became a member of the SS. Verschuer described Mengele as an intelligent and cultured man with "a keen interest in medical research and surgery", and with the professor's support, he rose through the ranks to become an SS officer. After fighting on the Eastern Front and receiving the Iron Cross for his bravery, Mengele was transferred to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in autumn 1943.

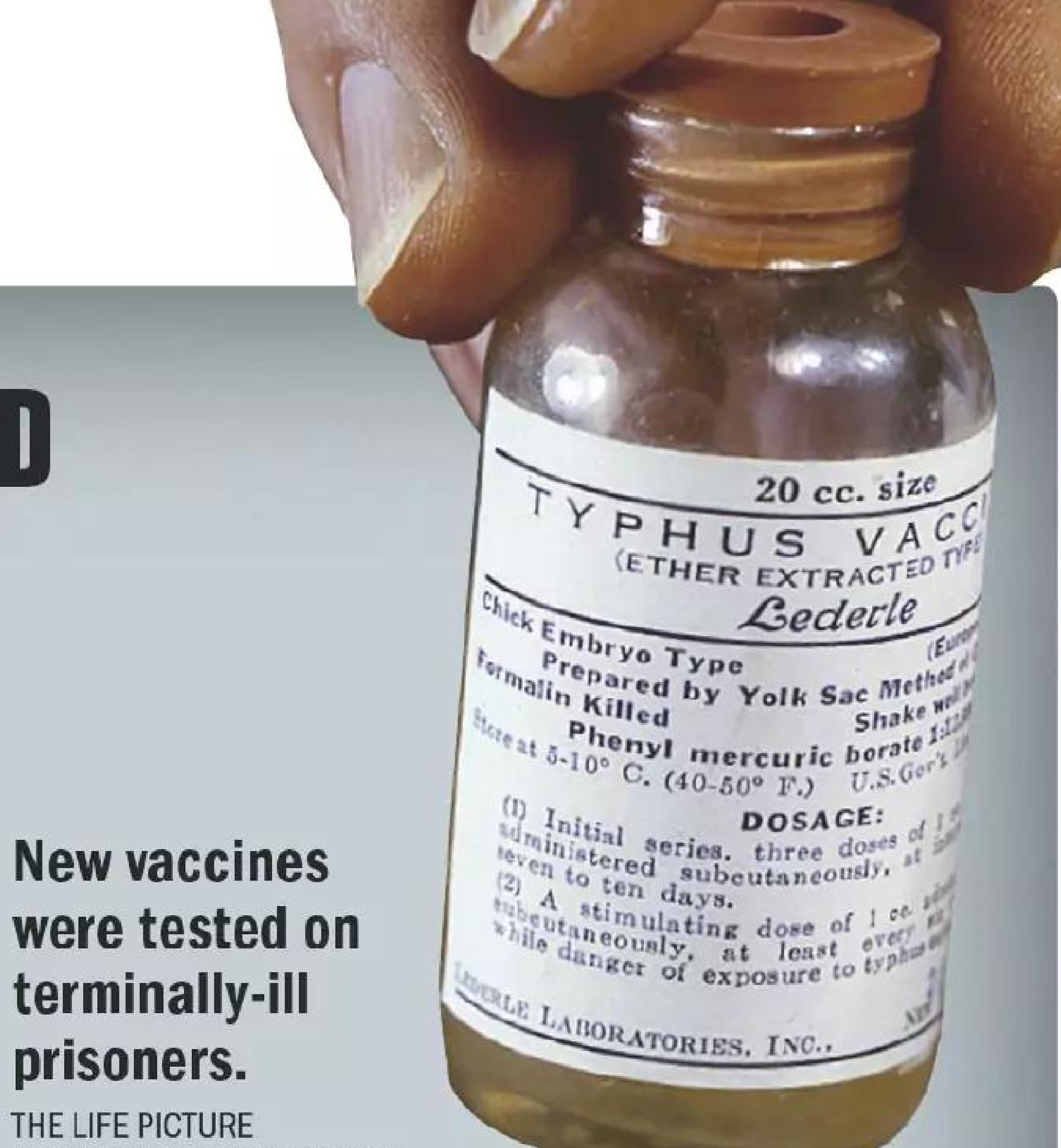
Here, the war hero was met with respect, but the other officers quickly noticed that the new doctor stood out from the rest; Mengele was strikingly eager in his duties and always involved in some secretive project. Moreover, he hardly ever touched alcohol, even when it was his turn to conduct *"die Selektion"* – the selection.

Every time an overcrowded train arrived with prisoners, the camp doctors had to determine who would live and who would be sent to the gas chambers. The task was unpopular and took a heavy toll on the doctors, who often resorted to alcohol, morphine and ether to cope with the job. Many were so intoxicated that they could barely stand on the railway platform, or ramp, as it was also known.

> **"We were only ten years old, but from then on, Miriam and I had no more family. We were alone, without any idea of what that meant"**
>
> EVA MOZES KOR, A ROMANIAN JEW

But not Mengele. He would often volunteer and carried out "die Selektion" calmly, decisively and enthusiastically – a devilish task that earned him the postwar nickname the Angel of Death. To ensure he selected the perfect subjects for his laboratory, Mengele even showed up for ramp duty on his days off, driven by his desire to become a recognised scientist.

PRISONERS INFECTED WITH TYPHUS



New vaccines were tested on terminally-ill prisoners.

THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES

Unhygienic conditions on the front lines during World War II made the once life-threatening infectious disease, typhus, a significant problem for the Nazis. German doctors experimented with various preparations developed by pharmaceutical companies such as Bayer and Behringwerke to find an effective treatment that could make the 'master race' immune to the disease.

Several camps set up entire departments dedicated to typhus research, where prisoners were injected with the disease. They were then treated with vaccines or pills that had not yet been approved for use – and often proved ineffective.

By testing new drugs on prisoners in the concentration camps, with no regard for whether they survived or not, the pharmaceutical industry was able to cut several years off the usual time required to develop new treatments. Additionally, the large-scale human experiments provided the Nazis with more realistic and applicable results than animal testing could have.

TODAY...

...it takes around 15 years from the time a pharmaceutical company begins developing a new drug until it has been tested in laboratory, animal and human trials, and is ready to be stocked in pharmacies.

Twins were the doctor's property

Through his experiments, Mengele aimed to provide solid scientific proof to support the Nazis' ideas about heredity. He also wanted to shed light on the exact genetic transmission of certain disorders, deformities and immune system deficiencies. His mission was to find the key to controlling human genes so that the master race of blonde, blue-eyed Aryans could be selectively bred – and as quickly as possible. To achieve this, Mengele sought an effective method to increase the incidence of twin births among Germanic women, allowing the Aryans to reproduce faster than other races and ultimately dominate the world.

In Mengele's eyes, twins were the perfect subjects for research in genetics, and he was especially interested in the identical twins who arrived at the concentration camp. Since their genes were identical, experiments on one twin provided an excellent basis for comparison. For example, he could infect one of the children with a disease and allow it to run its course, while the other twin served as the control group. When the sick twin succumbed, he would also kill the healthy twin, then perform autopsies on both to compare their bodies.

Unlike the other prisoners in Auschwitz's kingdom of death, the twins lived under relatively better conditions. They were spared having their hair shaved off and were allowed to keep their clothes. The twins were neither beaten nor forced into labour like the other prisoners, and they held a special status, since the guards didn't dare touch them. They viewed the twins as Dr Mengele's private property.

Survived inhumane experiments

Among the twins who came under Mengele's care were ten-year-old Eva and Miriam Mozes Kor, who were immediately separated from their parents and two older sisters upon arrival at the camp.

"Maybe a half hour had passed ... It's still unimaginable for me how it all »

DPA/RITZAU SCANPIX

Doctors carefully measured the emaciated prisoners' temperature and heart rate.

PRISONERS DIED IN FREEZING WATER

How long can humans survive in ice-cold water? Nazi doctors investigated this through experiments involving hundreds of concentration camp prisoners in Dachau. The background for these experiments was the frequent reports from the German Luftwaffe that pilots, who had ejected from a downed aircraft over the sea, often succumbed to the cold while waiting to be rescued from the water.

In the experiments, prisoners were immersed, either naked or wearing Luftwaffe flight suits, in tanks of water ranging between 2 and 12°C. Doctors closely monitored body temperature using a rectal thermometer, and heart function was recorded using a monitor on the chest.

Typically, the prisoners died after six to eight hours, when their temperature dropped to around 25°C. Nearly 100 prisoners lost their lives this way. The doctors also took this opportunity to test resuscitation methods. These included placing the frozen prisoners in warm baths, wrapping them in blankets, or placing them between naked women – the idea being that the women could warm the victims through both body heat and sexual stimulation.

TODAY...

...doctors' knowledge of hypothermia is partially based on these test results. Researchers have also experimented on pigs, which have a similar body temperature to humans and whose bodies behave in much the same way during hypothermia.

happened so fast. We were only ten years old, but from then on, Miriam and I had no more family. We were alone, without any idea of what that meant," recounted Eva Mozes Kor.

A guard led Eva and her sister to a cold, dirty wooden barrack housing a group of twin girls, and assigned them a bunk bed with a straw mattress and filthy blankets. The girls' fellow prisoners told them that the only reason they were still alive was because they would be used for medical experiments. They were right. Six days a week, Eva and Miriam were taken to Mengele's lab. "Monday, Wednesday, Friday they would put me naked in a room with my twin sister and many other twins, up to eight hours a day. They would measure every part of my body, compare it to my twin sister and then compare charts," she recalled. "On alternate days, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, they would take us to a blood lab. They would tie both of my arms to restrict the blood flow, take a lot of blood from my left arm and give me a minimum of five injections in the right arm."

The injections made Eva sick and she sensed that her life was in danger: "They measured my fever and then took me to the hospital. This was a barrack filled with people who were more dead than alive. Next morning, Dr Mengele and four other doctors came to see me. Mengele never examined me. He looked at the fever chart, and then said, laughing sarcastically, 'Too bad. She's so young. She has only two weeks to live.' I knew he was right, but I refused to die," explained Eva Mozes Kor.

For two weeks, she hovered between life and death, but miraculously, she recovered and was discharged. "If I had died in the infirmary, Miriam would have been rushed to the lab and killed with a shot of chloroform to her heart. Simultaneous autopsies would have compared my diseased organs to her healthy ones ... However, I, a ten-year-old girl, had triumphed over Mengele by surviving his experiment," said Eva, who, along with her sister, was among the few to escape the Angel of Death's chamber of horrors alive.

Walls covered in eyeballs

Compared to other twins, the experiments that Eva and Miriam endured were relatively mild. Often, Mengele performed surgical procedures without anaesthesia to study the children's pain thresholds and to see whether one twin could withstand more pain than the other. At other times, he injected them with deadly bacteria, such as typhus and tuberculosis, to determine how quickly they would succumb to the disease.

To gain the terrified children's trust, Mengele would first offer them sweets or chocolate. "Don't be afraid," he would say soothingly, before starting his horrifying experiments.

The 12-year-old twin brothers Moshe and Tibi Offer, who arrived at the camp in 1944, were among the pairs where one did not survive: "One day my twin brother, Tibi, was taken away for some special experiments ... Mengele performed numerous experiments on Tibi, and one of the procedures paralysed my brother. He could no longer walk. Then they cut off his testicles. After the fourth operation, I never saw him again," Moshe Offer said.

The list of Mengele's atrocities was almost endless. If he discovered that one twin had abnormalities – such as a curved spine – he would not hesitate to kill both children, then boil their skeletons for comparison.

To see if it was possible to change the colour of the iris from dark to blue, Mengele injected adrenaline into the children's eyes or applied chemicals. These experiments also involved adults and other children. At one point, he sent for 36 small children from one of the prisoner barracks. They had adrenaline injected into their brown eyes. Many of them immediately went blind, but their eyes did not turn blue, so Mengele ordered them to be gassed. Other times, he would remove the eyeballs from twins with different coloured eyes and store them in his private lab. "They were pinned up like butterflies. I thought I was dead and already living in hell," recalled a prisoner, Vera Kringel, who discovered an entire wall covered with eyeballs.

Japanese had their own Mengele

The Angel of Death inflicted boundless pain, torture and death, and was the most feared man in Auschwitz-Birkenau. But he was not alone in his 'medical' crimes; in other camps, doctors conducted similarly gruesome experiments. Japan had its own Dr Mengele in the form of physician and general Ishii Shiro. After Japan invaded Manchuria in north-eastern China in 1931, he established a secret research facility, the Japanese Army's Unit 731, in a complex in Pingfang near the Chinese city of Harbin.

The unit's ambition was to develop biochemical weapons for the Japanese Army. Ishii Shiro and his staff of around 300 doctors carried out biological and medical experiments on as many as 6,000 Chinese prisoners. They injected bacteria into the prisoners to determine the lethal dose, and used electric shocks to investigate how many volts were required to kill a person. Other prisoners were forced to march, naked, in biting cold, after which the doctors experimented with various treatments for frostbite. To determine when the prisoners were ready to be reheated, the guards would strike the frozen limbs with a hammer – if the limbs gave a hollow sound, it was time for treatment.

Other prisoners had their livers irradiated and destroyed with X-rays, while some had horse urine injected into their kidneys. The guards also served disease-infected chocolate, coffee and biscuits to their victims. The aim was to investigate how the Japanese could most effectively target the enemy's food supply.

Not one Chinese prisoner left the experimentation centre alive. After

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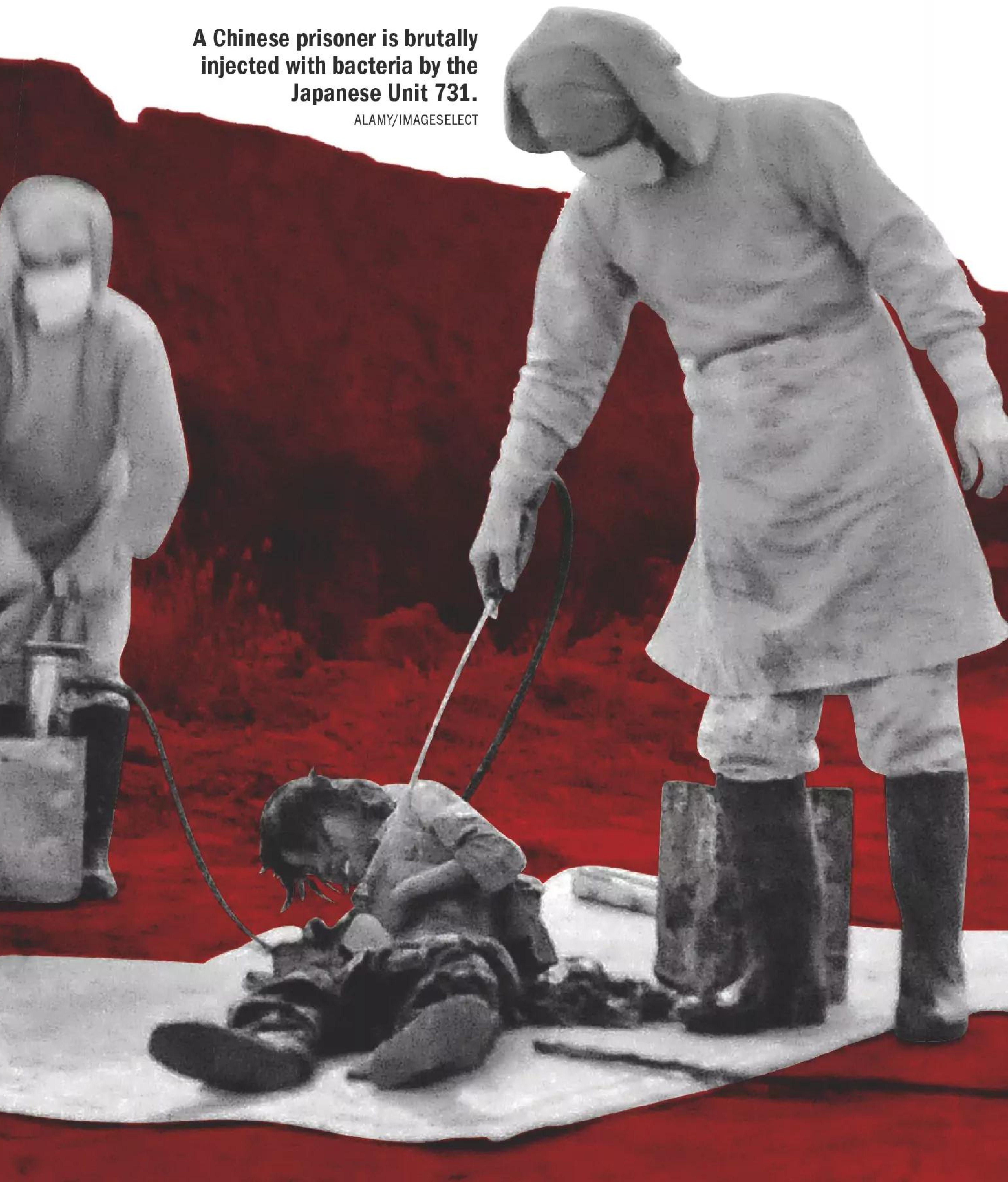
Doctor Ishii Shiro is known as Japan's equivalent of Josef Mengele.

MASAO TAKEZAWA



A Chinese prisoner is brutally injected with bacteria by the Japanese Unit 731.

ALAMY/IMAGESELECT

TWINS ARE AMONG RESEARCHERS' PREFERRED SUBJECTS FOR EXPERIMENTS

Josef Mengele had a penchant for brutal twin experiments, and over time, twins have repeatedly come under the scrutiny of researchers. With identical genes and similar upbringing, twins are prime candidates for studies on heredity and the environment, among other things.

Mengele sewed twins together

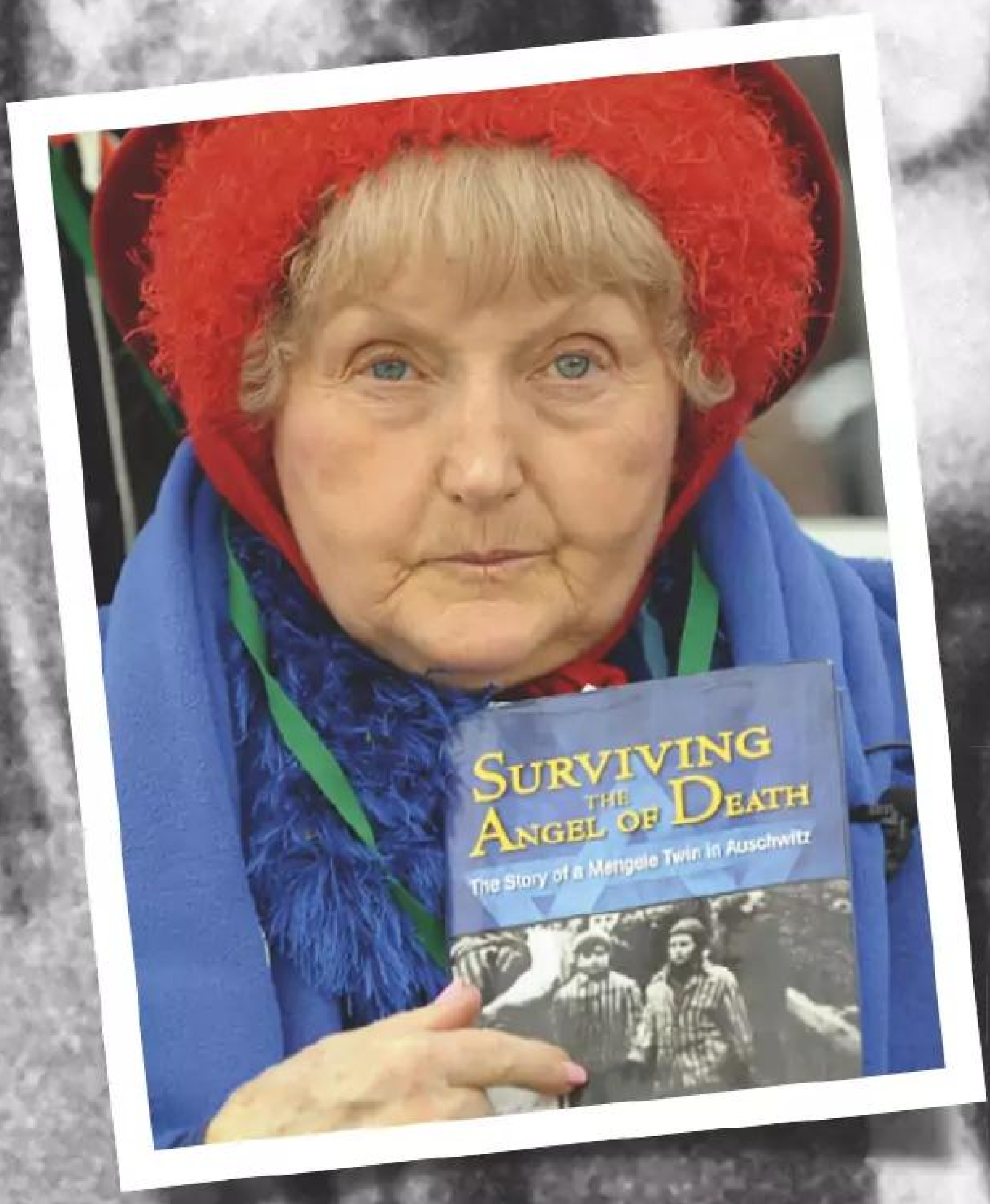
1943 Josef Mengele specifically selected twins for his horrific experiments in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. The Nazi doctor's experiments were extremely brutal and painful, setting them apart from later twin studies, of which researchers have conducted many.

Twins are of great interest to science because they resemble each other to a significant degree. They are born at the same time and usually share the same upbringing – and if they are identical twins, they have exactly the same genes. Therefore, twins can provide valuable insights when researchers wish to study heredity or investigate how genes and the environment affect health, functional ability, and diseases. Mengele was deeply fascinated by the fact that one twin could be strong and well proportioned while the other could be weak and deformed. He attempted to solve this mystery by surgically connecting the blood vessels of one twin to the other, thus giving them a shared circulatory system.

According to eyewitnesses, Mengele also conducted an experiment where he sewed a pair of four-year-old twins together as conjoined twins. One child had a hunchback and was sewn to the other child, back to back. Their blood vessels were also connected. The procedure was so painful that the children cried day and night. Both twins died as a result of the brutal experiment.

When one twin died, Mengele also killed the other so he could perform a comparative autopsy.

UNKNOWN


SURVIVING THE ANGEL OF DEATH
The Story of a Mengele Twin in Auschwitz

Eva Mozes Kor and her twin sister, Miriam, were among the few who survived Mengele's twin experiments.

JANEK SKARZYNSKI/AFP/RITZAU SCANPIX

Twins were separated and placed for adoption

1980 In an effort to clarify the age-old question of whether heredity or environment has a greater influence on our lives and health, the Austrian-born child psychiatrist Peter Neubauer conducted a controversial study with identical twins and triplets in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s.

Shortly after birth, the children were placed for adoption through the Louise Wise Services agency in New York, and scattered to new families across the USA. At least eight pairs of twins and one set of triplets were separated, and the adoptive parents were never informed that their children had identical siblings. Throughout their childhood, the children were interviewed, filmed and photographed by research assistants who claimed they were merely visiting to check on the children's well-being.

When Neubauer concluded his experiment in 1980, he refused to publish the results – fearing condemnation. By that time, several of the adopted children had randomly met their unknown siblings and had come forward in the media with their heartbreaking stories. The documents from the study will remain sealed in Yale University's archives until 2065.

SEVENTH ART RELEASING

In 2018, a documentary was released about the triplets from Neubauer's experiment.

Scientists manipulated twins' genes

2018 When the Chinese biophysicist He Jiankui announced in November 2018 that he, along with colleagues from Shenzhen University, had created the world's first gene-edited babies, twin girls Lulu and Nana, it sent shock waves around the world.

Using the CRISPR gene-editing technique, the researchers had manipulated the twins' genes while still in the embryonic stage. The intention was to protect them from contracting the HIV virus later in life, but there were concerns that the editing might have resulted in unwanted mutations in the children's genes.

The news sparked outrage and criticism from scientists who deemed the treatment unethical. Many compared the experiment to Frankenstein's laboratory. In 2019, He Jiankui was sentenced to three years in prison for illegal medical practice, according to the Chinese news agency Xinhua, and was also fined around £329,000.

基因天书
The Human Genome

Biophysicist He Jiankui became notorious for manipulating the human genome.
GETTY IMAGES

Twin astronauts demystified science of weightlessness

2019 Mark and Scott Kelly are identical twins – and astronauts. This unique combination paved the way for a two-year experiment in which the US space agency NASA mapped the physiological and mental consequences of long-term space travel. In the study, Mark remained on Earth while Scott travelled to the International Space Station (ISS), where he spent 340 days in a weightless environment, until March 2016.

Before, during and after Scott's time on the ISS, researchers conducted a series of comparative studies on the two brothers to find answers on how space affects the body and mind. In April 2019, NASA presented the results: weightlessness, cosmic radiation, and isolation on the ISS had left significant marks on Scott Kelly's body and triggered changes in his chromosomes.

Mark and Scott Kelly are the world's first astronaut twins.
ROBERT MARKOWITZ/NASA

enduring unimaginable torment, many of them were even dissected alive. Their organs were removed one by one, and finally, the body was cremated.

Syphilis injected into spinal cord

On the other side of the globe, in Guatemala, Central America, the US health authorities, in collaboration with local officials, also conducted human experiments. Around 1,500 Guatemalans were unknowingly enrolled in an experiment on sexually transmitted diseases. The aim was to determine whether the new wonder drug, penicillin, could cure sexually transmitted infections, which posed a significant problem for the US military, because large numbers of servicemen were incapacitated by such diseases at the time. Between 1946 and 1948, Guatemalan sex workers, prisoners, psychiatric patients, soldiers and even orphans were deliberately exposed to these diseases. Prisoners were given access to infected prostitutes, or had disease-causing bacteria applied directly on to their genitals, arms or faces. In some instances, syphilis bacteria were even injected into the spinal cords of people who had never given their consent.

> “Mengele performed numerous experiments on Tibi ... One of the procedures paralysed him. After the fourth operation, I never saw him again”
>
> MOSHE OFFER ON HIS BROTHER

Around 800 people were deliberately infected with syphilis, gonorrhoea or chancroid, a very rare sexually transmitted disease. At least 83 Guatemalans died in what a US commission later described as “a stain on medical history”.

Pregnant women kicked in belly

Josef Mengele infected his own test subjects with syphilis while in Auschwitz, as well as performing many surgical procedures, including attempts to extract bone marrow without anaesthesia. Mengele would cut into prisoners’ bones and use a chisel to remove pieces of the bone before inserting a tube. Many patients passed out on the operating table in pain.

Despite having no experience in surgery, the Angel of Death also conducted sterilisation experiments. Subjects were castrated, sterilised, had a testicle removed, or had acid injected directly into the fallopian tubes.

Initially, he ordered that all pregnant women in the camp should be gassed. He later decided that they could give birth, but that the newborns would be immediately drowned. Polish prisoner Feiga Horovitz recounted that Mengele

During the Nuremberg medical trials, several prominent German scientists were sentenced to death – including the Nazi doctor Karl Brandt, who oversaw the Nazis’ notorious euthanasia programme.

GENERAL/TOPFOTO/RITZAU SCANPIX

KARL BRANDT

visited the pregnancy ward almost daily: "Three women had to go to him at a time. During the examination, each of the women had to bend over, and the defendant inserted an instrument tube into the rectum. The introduction was so brutal that all women bled. Mengele laughed and made fun of it. Pregnant women had to lie on their backs, and the defendant kicked his boots at the belly until they miscarried," Horovitz stated.

Mengele fled to Latin America

At Auschwitz, Mengele tried to maintain an impression of detachment from his horrific experiments – he wanted to appear as a rational scientist, not as an executioner.

However, at times, his controlled facade cracked and the beast lurking beneath would emerge. Camp doctor Gisella Perl witnessed one of these moments when Mengele's rage was unleashed on a female prisoner who'd attempted to escape: "He grabbed her by the neck and proceeded to beat her head to a bloody pulp ... screaming at her ... 'You want to escape, don't you? You can't escape now ... You are going to burn like the others ... you dirty Jew!' As I watched, her two beautiful, intelligent eyes disappeared under a layer of blood. Her ears were no longer there – perhaps he had torn them off. And within seconds, her straight, sharp nose was a broken, bleeding mass."

By the autumn of 1944, air raid sirens over Auschwitz were becoming more and more frequent, and it became increasingly clear that defeat was inevitable. Day by day, the Soviet army drew nearer, and Mengele realised he had to flee. The last person to see him at Auschwitz was prison doctor Martina Puzyna. She had been tasked with documenting all the details of the twins subjected to Mengele's experiments. On 17th January 1945, she saw the Angel of Death for the last time: "He took all my papers, put them into two boxes, and had them taken outside to a waiting car," she recounted.

After that, Mengele disappeared from Auschwitz and, in 1949, fled to Latin America, where he died in a drowning accident in 1979.

Doctors sentenced to death

While Josef Mengele escaped punishment, several of his medical colleagues were held accountable for their crimes in the concentration camps. After World War II, the victorious Allied powers established the International Military Tribunal, which in Nuremberg, Germany, was tasked with prosecuting the major German war criminals.

As part of this judicial reckoning, the Doctors' Trial was conducted in 1946 and 1947, in which 23 top German scientists, including 20 doctors, were charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Nazi doctors defended their actions by referring to the "utility" of the experiments, saying that the welfare of the subjects had to be subordinated to this goal.

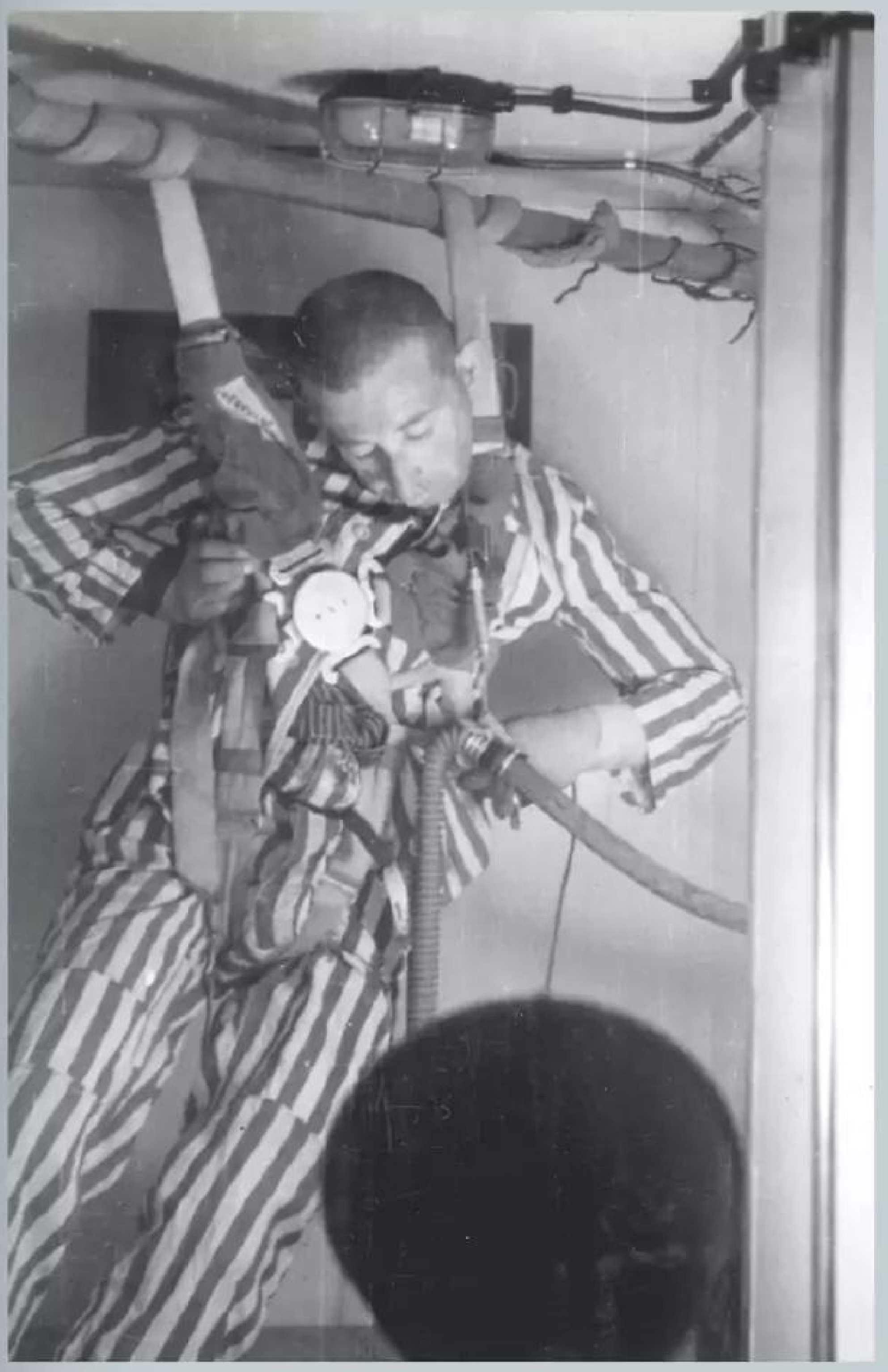
The medical trial resulted in seven death sentences in August 1947 and led to the formulation of the Nuremberg Code, which sets strict limits on doctors' ability to conduct research on human subjects. However, it was too late for the unwilling test subjects of Mengele's experiments in Auschwitz-Birkenau. When the Red Army soldiers liberated the camp on 27th January 1945, the majority of Dr Mengele's so-called research material had been exterminated – only about 180 of the 3,000 twins had survived, and the total death toll reached approximately 1.1 million.

The Nuremberg Code established non-negotiable ethical principles for medical research worldwide – such as the requirement that participants must always give informed consent to take part in experiments, and that they have the right to withdraw at any time. In this sense, the monstrous human experiments of Mengele and his colleagues had a lasting impact on medical science – but not at all in the way the Angel of Death had intended. ■

PRISONERS IN PARACHUTES WERE SUBJECTED TO EXTREME PRESSURE

The Nazi war machine was developing aircraft capable of reaching altitudes of over 20 kilometres. However, no one knew how the oxygen-poor air and low pressure would affect the pilots. In the concentration camp at Dachau, the Luftwaffe's chief physician, Sigmund Rascher, experimented on hundreds of prisoners aged between 20 and 40 years. They were suspended in parachute gear in a pressure chamber where the pressure conditions at various altitudes were simulated.

Typically, the prisoners would faint. Several died, and were autopsied so the doctor could see how their internal organs reacted to the lack of oxygen and the extreme pressure changes. The experiments were described in detail and, in some cases, documented with photographs. After the war, the results contributed to US research in aviation and space medicine.

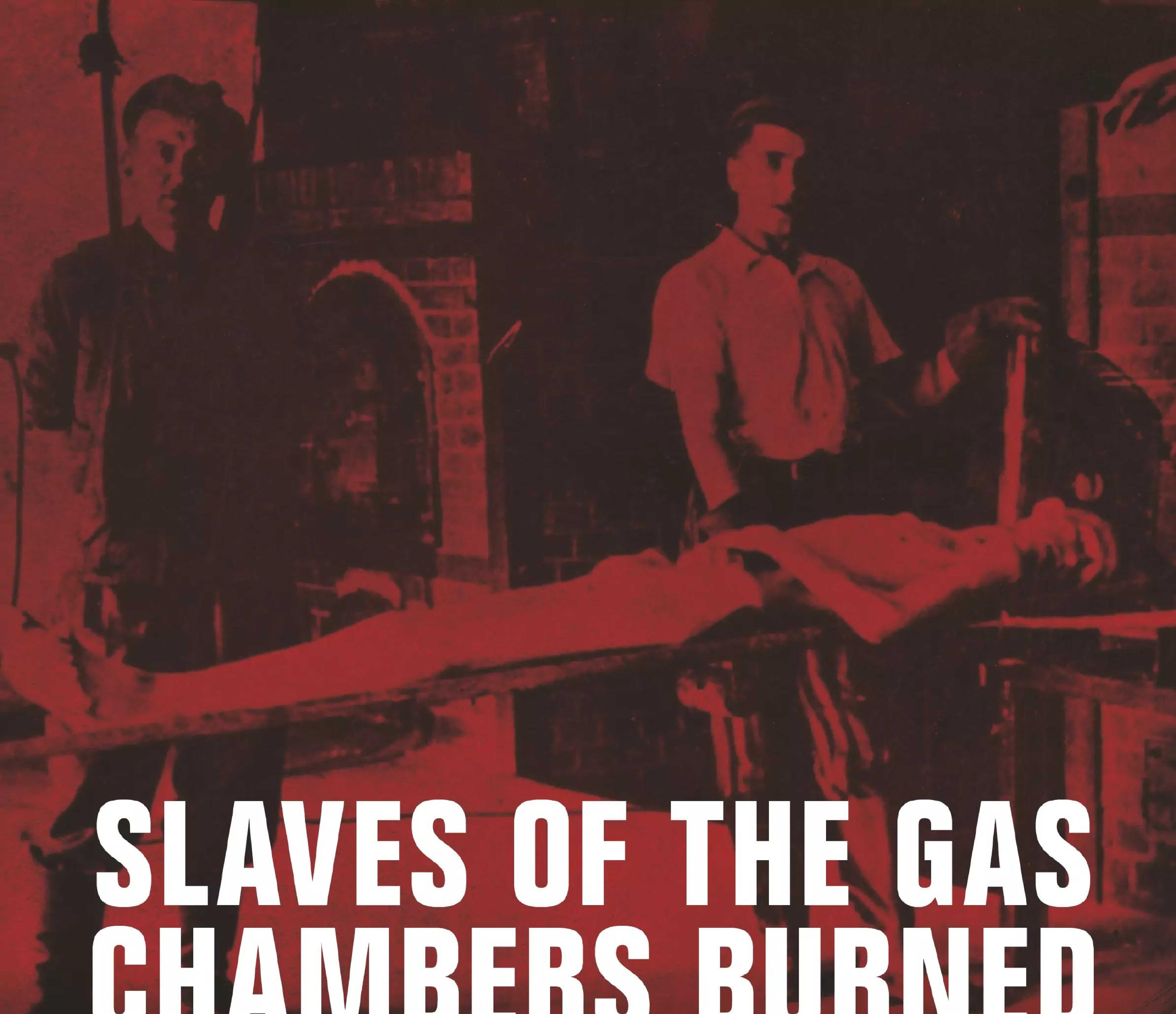


Knowledge from these experiments was used in American space research.

TOPFOTO/RITZAU SCANPIX

TODAY...

...trainee fighter pilots are exposed to extreme atmospheric conditions in a modern pressure chamber so they learn to recognise the symptoms of oxygen deprivation. They are then prepared to react appropriately if an emergency arises – such as in the case of a leaking oxygen mask.



SLAVES OF THE GAS CHAMBERS BURNED THEIR OWN

A small group of Jewish prisoners was selected for forced labour in Auschwitz's gas chambers. They witnessed the Nazi genocide up close – and their testimonies provide a rare insight into how the killing factory operated, from the moment the victims arrived at the camp until they were reduced to ashes.

By Mikkel Andersson

Shortly after the liberation of Auschwitz, a manuscript was found near the ruins of the camp's gas chambers. "Come here you free citizen of the world, whose life is safeguarded by human morality and whose existence is guaranteed through law. I want to tell you how modern criminals and despicable murderers have trampled the morality of life and nullified the postulates of existence," the manuscript begins.

The sombre text was written by the Polish Jew Zalmen Gradowski, who belonged to a special group in Auschwitz – a group that came closer to the killing machine than any other prisoners: the Sonderkommando.

Auschwitz's meticulously planned killing process required people to calm the condemned and tell them, as they undressed, that they were merely going to take a shower. The victims' clothes and belongings had to be sorted, the gas chambers emptied once the killing was over, rings removed from stiff fingers, gold teeth wrenched from the mouths of the dead, and thousands of corpses burned in huge crematorium ovens or on pyres. The camp's German SS personnel left this horrific work to Jewish slaves, the Sonderkommando, who were given the unenviable choice of assisting the SS in the killing process or becoming victims of it themselves.

Unlike the other camp prisoners, members of the Sonderkommando did not suffer physical deprivation. They had access to good beds, daily warm baths, and food and alcohol left behind by the dead. But day after day, they had to assist in the murder of thousands of innocent people, and it was not uncommon for members of the Sonderkommando to encounter family, friends and acquaintances before the gassing – or to find them among the corpses afterwards. The

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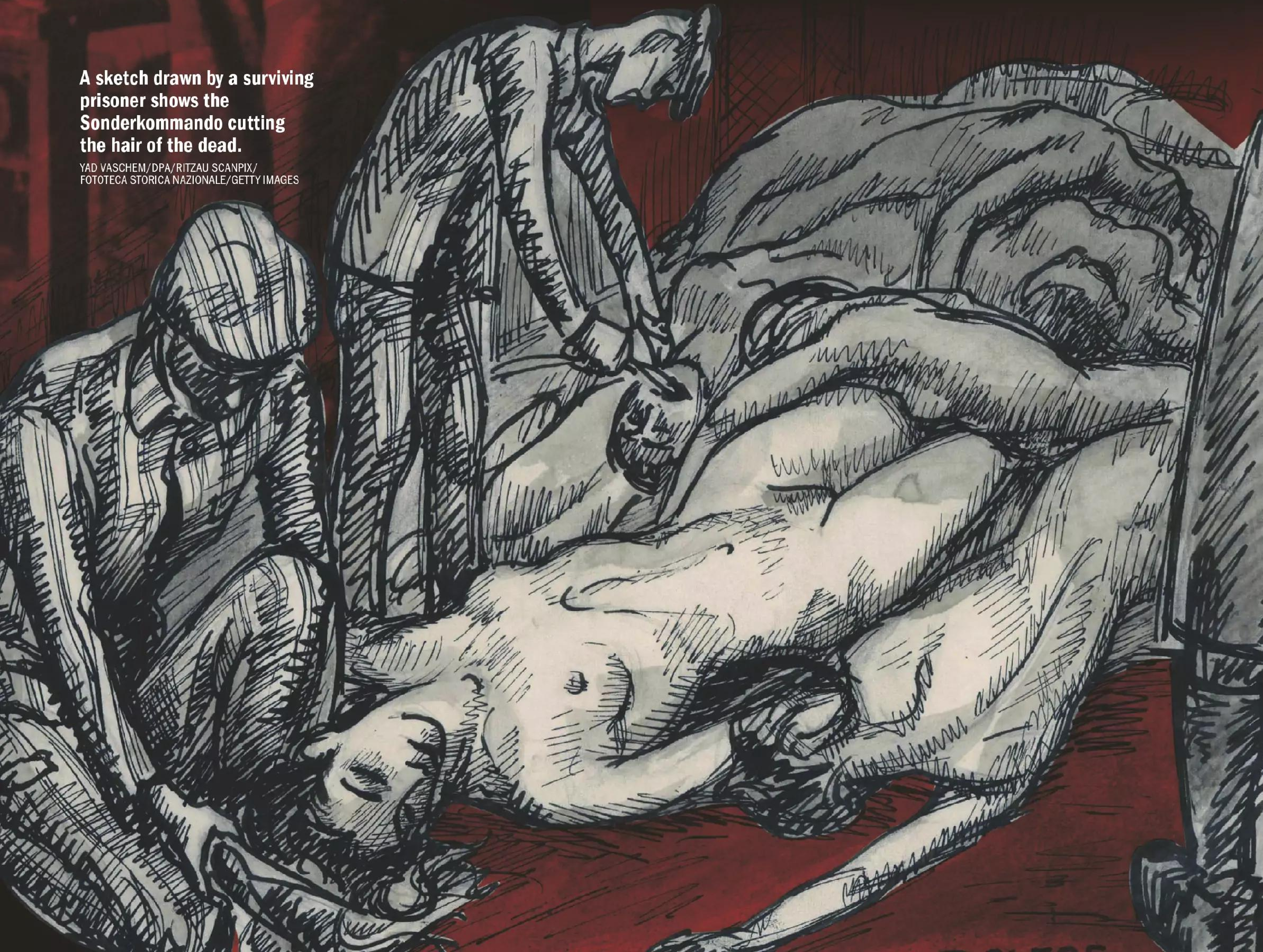
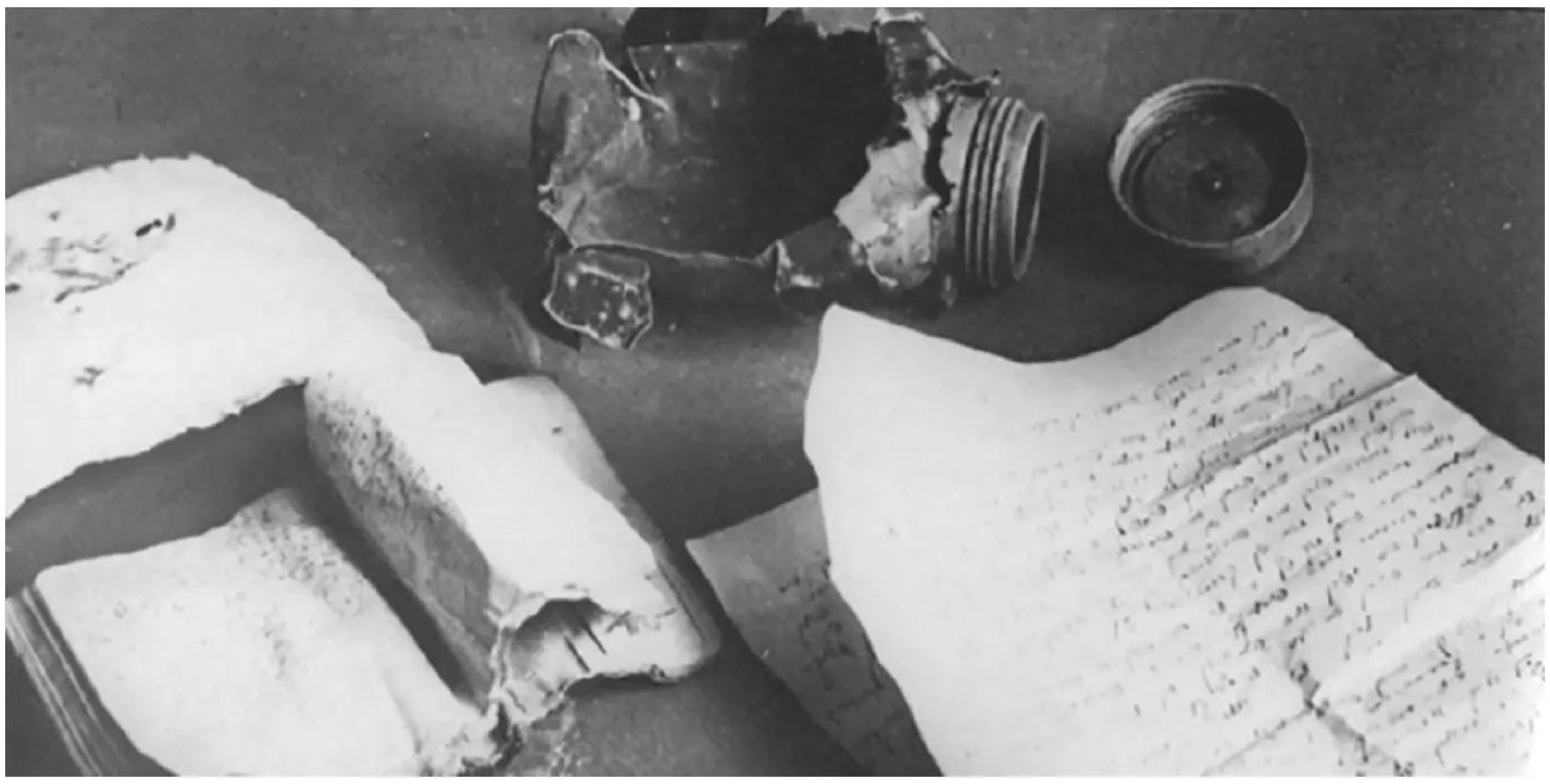


A sketch drawn by a surviving prisoner shows the Sonderkommando cutting the hair of the dead.

YAD VASCHEM/DPA/RITZAU SCANPIX/ FOTOTECA STORICA NAZIONALE/GETTY IMAGES


BIRKENAU STATE MUSEUM

The Jew Zalmen Gradowski described his experiences in the Sonderkommando and buried the text in a bottle near the gas chambers. It was found after the liberation of Auschwitz.

Sonderkommando knew that if the gassings stopped, the SS personnel would kill them to avoid having witnesses. Most prisoners were thus destined to lose their lives sooner or later. Throughout the camp's existence, several thousand Jews worked as slaves in the Sonderkommando, but fewer than 60 survived – and Zalmen Gradowski was not one of them.

In recent decades, more testimonies have emerged from the few surviving members of the Sonderkommando; for many years plagued by shame over their forced participation in the Holocaust. Only later in life did they begin to share their experiences and through them, we now have a picture of what their life was like, and how the most efficient killing machine in world history operated.

The work led to suicide attempts

Any healthy male Jewish prisoner in Auschwitz risked ending up in the Sonderkommando. Both newly arrived and seasoned prisoners could be put to work at a moment's notice. The Polish Jew Yaakov Silberberg had survived nearly two years in the camp before he was selected. He knew full well that thousands were being killed daily but that didn't lessen the shock of what he encountered in the gas chamber.

"I went there and right away I saw this scene: the large, long room where the people undressed was full of corpses, arranged in layers up to the ceiling. They were no longer shaped like human beings; they were swollen and black… The bodies were allowed to accumulate there because the furnaces didn't have the capacity to cremate them. I asked myself, 'Where am I?'" Silberberg later recounted. So shaken by the first day's work, he considered suicide. However, a friend already in the Sonderkommando talked him out of it over several glasses of alcohol.

The impact of the forced labour was often even worse for those who had no prior experience with the camp. Polish Jew Shlomo Dragon, arrived in Auschwitz with his brother Abraham, in 1942; both unaware of the mass exterminations. Soon, the brothers were chosen for the Sonderkommando by SS officer Otto Moll, and taken to a small building outside Birkenau, one of the early gas chambers, known as Bunker 2.

> "The dead bodies were lying there, closely packed together, on top of each other, so that when the door opened they all fell and piled up next to the door."
>
> SHLOMO DRAGON, POLISH JEW

"As Moll opened the door of the house, bodies fell out… The dead bodies were lying there, closely packed together, on top of each other, so that when the door opened they all fell and piled up next to the door. I saw how the bodies were falling – bodies of adults and children… Almost all of us went into shock… We were too terrified to make a sound," Dragon recalled. In despair, he later slashed his wrists but was saved, just in time, by his brother.

Most prisoners slowly grew accustomed to the gruesome work. "The bodies no longer had any value for me… I no longer related to them as I would to human bodies. Sometimes they were covered with blood and faeces. You can get so used to sights like these that during breaks or whenever people got hungry, they sat down on the bodies and ate," said Yaakov Silberberg.

They ate the lunches of the dead

Daily life in the Sonderkommando was markedly different from the rest of Auschwitz. Normally, prisoners were in constant danger of starvation; surviving on a diet of thin soup with rotten meat, bread filled with sawdust, and 'coffee', – an indistinct brownish liquid. The Sonderkommando had the same rations but also had access to the small packed lunches prisoners had brought with them when they arrived at the camp.

In addition, they had better accommodation than other prisoners. After the combined gas chamber and crematorium buildings were put into use in the spring of 1943, the majority of the Sonderkommando lived in the same buildings as the gas chambers, thus avoiding the cold, leaky camp barracks. Sonderkommando usually had their own bed – a luxury in a camp where four or five prisoners shared a single, often lice-infested bunk.

While much of the forced labour was characterised by constant supervision and brutal violence from SS guards, the SS only interfered to a limited extent in the Sonderkommando's tasks. As long as the disposal of bodies and sorting of belongings went to plan, the guards were relatively satisfied. However, if the arrival of new trainloads suddenly slowed, even the Sonderkommando couldn't be sure of their safety. The SS had no qualms about executing surplus workers, and particularly sadistic SS officers would sometimes kill members for no legitimate reason.

SS Officer Moll, for example, seemed to derive great satisfaction from humiliating and tormenting his victims. The Italian-Greek Jew Yaakov Gabai recalled a situation in Krema IV, where a group of Greeks were dragging the gassed to the crematorium: “A body slipped out of the hands of one of them and fell to the floor. Moll, who happened to be there just then, pulled out his handgun and shot the Greek… That was Moll. The worst of them all.”

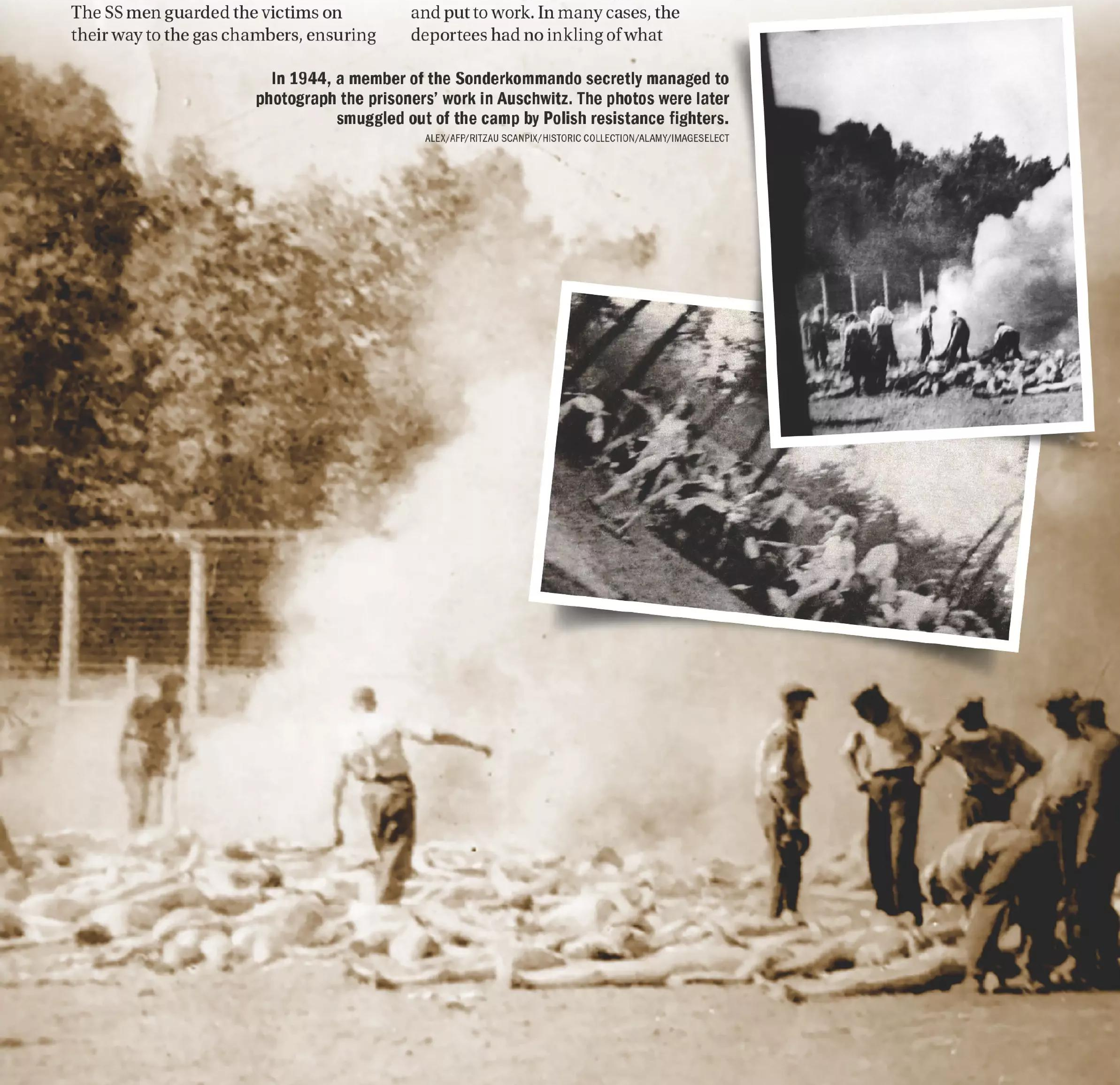
The bodies held on to each other

The SS men guarded the victims on their way to the gas chambers, ensuring no one escaped and standing ready to brutally suppress any sign of resistance. However, beyond this, the SS had no direct contact with the condemned – unlike the Sonderkommando.

The slave labourers encountered the victims when they arrived in the undressing rooms next to the gas chambers. Here, the Sonderkommando had to convince the new prisoners that they were merely going to take a bath, after which they would be given food and put to work. In many cases, the deportees had no inkling of what awaited them and went compliantly into the gas chambers.

But as rumours of the Nazis’ mass killings spread throughout occupied Europe, more and more of the deportees knew exactly what was about to happen. Filip Müller, a Czech Jew, describes a transportation from the ghettos in the towns of Sosnowiec and Bedzin, just a few kilometres from Auschwitz.

“They began to undress themselves and their own children, and it was



In 1944, a member of the Sonderkommando secretly managed to photograph the prisoners’ work in Auschwitz. The photos were later smuggled out of the camp by Polish resistance fighters.

ALEX/AFP/RITZAU SCANPIX/HISTORIC COLLECTION/ALAMY/IMAGESELECT as though, with each garment, they were discarding a little of their lives, those lives which for most of them had, in any case, consisted of want and privation. Many were fighting back their tears, afraid that their children might be alarmed or start asking questions again. The children, too, were looking around sad-eyed. Quite soon they were all undressed. Husbands and wives embraced, caressing their children and trying to comfort each other."

The SS men were also responsible for throwing the gas into the chambers. Cans of Zyklon B gas were driven to the chambers in a vehicle painted with fake Red Cross logos. Two SS men stepped out and poured the gas through openings designed for this purpose. In Krema II and III, where the gas chambers were in a basement, it was done through openings in the roof, while in Krema IV and V, which were above ground, hatches placed about two metres high were used.

The gas was contained in a bluish substance resembling cat litter that released it upon contact with air. Shortly after the gas was poured in, the victims began coughing and then screaming in mortal terror. After five to ten minutes, all was silent, and the chamber, which had just housed several hundred living people, was transformed into a large mass grave.

The ventilation was then activated to extract the remaining gas, and then the Sonderkommando could open the door to the chamber, from which a pungent stench of faeces and vomit spread. The grim work could then begin: "The Sonderkommando squad, outfitted with large rubber boots, lined up around the hill of bodies and flooded it with powerful jets of water. This was necessary because the final act of those who die by drowning or by gas is an involuntary defecation. Each body was befouled, and had to be washed. Once the 'bathing' of the dead was finished – a job the Sonderkommando carried out by a voluntary act of impersonalisation and in a state of profound distress – the separation of the welter of bodies began. It was a difficult job. They knotted thongs around the wrists, which were clenched in a vice-like grip," recounted the Jewish doctor Miklós Nyiszli, who worked in Krema II.

> **"They knotted thongs around the wrists, which were clenched in a vice-like grip"**
>
> MIKLÓS NYISZLI, JEWISH DOCTOR

Before cremation, everything that could be of use to the Third Reich was removed. Women's hair was cut off and used, among other things, to make felt, and gold teeth were extracted with pliers. Meanwhile, other members collected the clothes, shoes and belongings of the dead from the undressing room. The items were taken to a section of the camp officially known as the Effektenlager, but in camp jargon, it was called Kanada – named after the wealthy North American country, where, according to the prisoners, you could get everything your heart desired.

Large body parts were crushed

It was then time to burn the bodies. In Krema II and III, they were taken via a lift from a room outside the basement to the ovens on the ground floor of the gas chamber. In his manuscript, Zalmen Gradowski described what happened next: "Up at the top of the lift stand four men. Two on one side of the lift place the bodies in the 'reserve' room, and two who drag the bodies straight to the ovens. They are laid out two by two at the mouth of every oven. Small children lie off to one side, thrown together in a heap – to be added to two adult bodies. They are placed on the iron 'purification-board', then the mouth of Hell is opened and the board is slid into the oven. The hellish fire sticks out its tongues like open arms and swallows up the body like a treasure. The first to catch fire is the hair. The skin swells with blisters, which burst in a matter of seconds. The arms and legs begin to twitch – for the tightening blood vessels make the limbs move. The whole body is now aflame, the skin has burst, fat drips out and you hear the hissing of the burning fire… The whole procedure takes 20 minutes – and a body that was once a world is now turned into ash."

To achieve maximum cremation speed, the so-called stokers, who operated the ovens, had to crush the larger body parts during the burning »

KONRAD KURZACZ

Jnes Meyer
Köln J 05377
Dr.
Aronsohn
NEUMANN ELLA
Sol
HARS
PREHOROV

All the belongings of the arriving prisoners were sent to a section of the camp known as Kanada. There, suitcases were sorted, and valuable items were sent to Germany to be sold.

GIFTGAS!
ZYKLON
D.OLERE

The artist David Olère, one of the surviving members of the Sonderkommando, later painted several haunting scenes from Auschwitz's gas chambers.

AUSCHWITZ MUSEUM

process using iron rods – a procedure referred to as "stirring" the bodies.

In a single day, more than 2,000 people could be cremated in Krema II and III, while the slightly smaller Krema IV and V could handle over 1,000. In the end, the ashes were collected and scattered over fields as fertiliser or taken to the nearby Soła River and dumped into the water.

The family camp was gassed

In September 1943, approximately 5,000 Jews arrived from the Czech concentration camp Theresienstadt, who were treated rather differently. Normally, men and women were separated upon arrival. Those who were not gassed were placed in gender-segregated sections of the camp, while all children were killed. But these families were allowed to stay together, everyone was allowed to keep their own clothes instead of wearing the blue-and-white striped camp uniforms, and none of the family camp's prisoners was forced into labour.

The reason why the SS chose to act so atypically is not known for certain, but it is believed that this was done to deceive organisations like the Red Cross, which had also visited Theresienstadt.

The Sonderkommando got wind that the family camp was living on borrowed time in early March 1944, and together with the camp's resistance movement, they made a determined effort to incite the family camp to revolt. But it was in vain. The leadership of the family camp did not believe they were doomed to death, given that the SS had granted them more privileges than the other prisoners for six months. Why would they do that only to gas them in the end?

On the evening of 8th March 1944, most of the Czech Jews met their end at the gas chambers. The Sonderkommando had to stand by and watch as those who had lived so close for six months walked to their deaths.

One of the Sonderkommando who had endeavoured to get the family camp to rise up was Filip Müller, himself a Czech Jew. In despair, he tried to sneak into the gas chamber with them, but being fully clothed, he was recognised by two younger women.

"So you want to die. But that's senseless. Your death won't give us back our lives. That's no way. You must get out of here alive, you must bear witness to our suffering, and to the injustice done to us." Filip Müller then left the gas chamber."

Prisoners began to revolt

Members of the Sonderkommando had become hardened by their brutal work, yet many had a desire to record their experiences. Several wrote testimonies, burying them underground for future generations. As well as Gradowski's text,

YAD VASHEM

Jewish prisoners, who have just arrived at Auschwitz, check their luggage – unaware that they will soon be sent to the gas chambers.

five others were found between 1945 and 1980. Using a smuggled camera, they also took photographs that show the mass murder taking place.

In one picture, members of the Sonderkommando can be seen standing outside Krema V in the summer of 1944, surrounded by corpses due to be burned in cremation pits. The pits were used to relieve the crematorium ovens, which were overwhelmed by the arrival of 300,000 Hungarian Jews. Another, more blurred, picture shows a group of naked women on their way to their deaths in the gas chamber at Krema V. The photograph is a rare image that captures a glimpse of the killing process at Auschwitz.

Nazis aimed to hide evidence

In the autumn of 1944, members of the Sonderkommando had been smuggling explosives, stolen by female prisoners working at a nearby factory, for some time. A resistance movement had formed, and the prisoners were now planning an uprising to destroy the gas chambers. However, the plans were thwarted by the SS, who announced that the Sonderkommando attached to Krema IV was to be reduced, which the members knew would mean death for many of them.

The Sonderkommando at Krema IV rose up spontaneously on 7th October 1944, and attacked their executioners with hammers and axes. After a brief and unequal fight, most of them perished either inside or outside Krema IV, which they succeeded in burning to the ground. The Sonderkommando at Krema II saw the smoke from Krema IV a few hundred metres away and interpreted it as a signal to revolt. After throwing an SS man alive into the crematorium ovens and creating a breach in the camp's barbed wire fence, several hundred fled the camp, soon to be caught by the SS a few kilometres away. In total, three SS men were killed during the uprising, while around 450 Sonderkommando members were murdered. One of them was Zalmen Gradowski, who had also been among the planners of the failed revolt.

In October 1944, the last transport of Jews to be murdered in Auschwitz's gas chambers arrived. In the months that followed, until January 1945, the surviving Sonderkommando were tasked with dismantling the gas chambers, which the SS eventually blew up to hide the evidence of their mass murder. The camp was then to be evacuated, and thousands of prisoners were sent on death marches to the west.

The SS continued to execute the remaining members of the Sonderkommando, but in the confusion of the evacuation and the advance of the Red Army, a few members managed to hide among the camp's other prisoners and survive until the end of the war. The Nazis had hoped the world would never learn of their crimes. But thanks to the testimonies of the survivors, we now have a fascinating, if gruesome, insight into the routines of the largest killing machine in history. ■

INDUSTRIALISED KILLING

Auschwitz was established as a concentration camp in the spring of 1940 and gradually expanded into the largest death factory in all of German-occupied Europe.

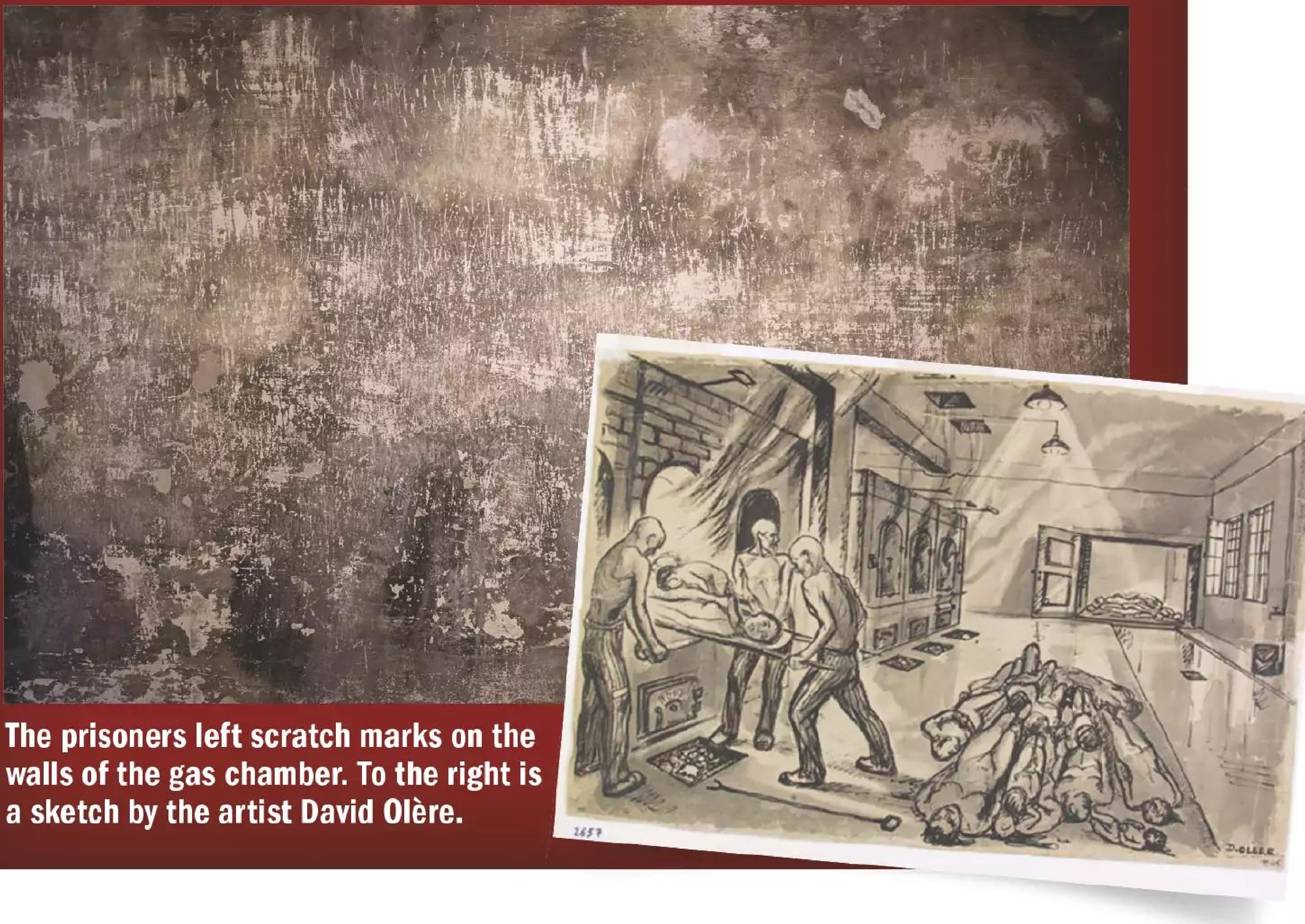
The Auschwitz complex consisted of more than 30 subcamps. The first camp, known as Auschwitz I or Auschwitz Main Camp (Stammlager), held around 15,000 prisoners. In the much larger camp, Auschwitz II, or Auschwitz-Birkenau, nearly 100,000 prisoners were held.

In the autumn of 1941, it was decided that Auschwitz would also function as an extermination camp, where Jews deported from across Europe were murdered in gas chambers. Typically, around 75-95 per cent of those arriving in a single train transport were killed immediately.

In total, the Germans established only six extermination camps: Sobibór, Treblinka, Bełzec, Chełmno, Majdanek and Auschwitz – the last two served as combined concentration and extermination camps. At different times in Auschwitz's history, a total of eight buildings were used for the mass gassing of people. The majority of the victims were murdered in four specially designed buildings in Auschwitz-Birkenau, which were put into use in the spring of 1943.

These buildings contained both gas chambers and crematoria, and became known as Krema II to V. Krema II and III were identical buildings located opposite each other. Krema IV and V were smaller and differently designed.

Most of the bodies were cremated in the massive ovens in Krema II-V, but at times – before the crematoria were built, and later when there were too many bodies for the ovens to handle – they were burned in large pits at sites within and just outside the camp.

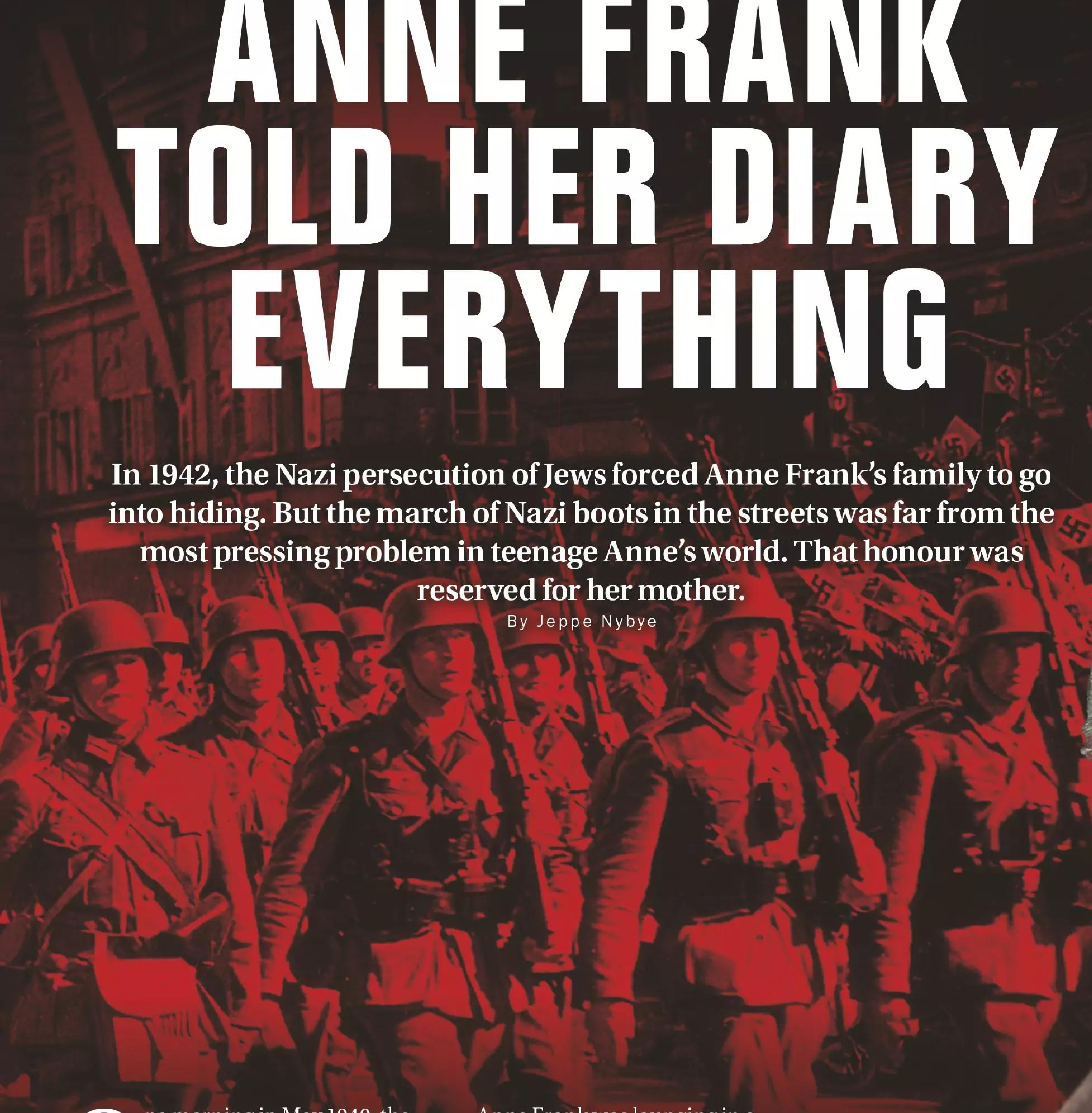


The prisoners left scratch marks on the walls of the gas chamber. To the right is a sketch by the artist David Olère.

KAY NIETFELD/DPA/RITZAU SCANPIX/YAD VASHEM

Teen rebel in hiding:

ANNE FRANK TOLD HER DIARY EVERYTHING



Beste Jet,
enzo in een spiegel
Hier heb ik
gekeken.

In 1942, the Nazi persecution of Jews forced Anne Frank's family to go into hiding. But the march of Nazi boots in the streets was far from the most pressing problem in teenage Anne's world. That honour was reserved for her mother.

By Jeppe Nybye

One morning in May 1940, the Dutch – probably including a 10-year-old Jewish girl called Anne Frank – woke to the sound of snarling aircraft engines. From the planes, Nazi Germany's paratroopers jumped out by the thousands with orders to capture strategically important sites. Meanwhile, on land, Hitler's army stormed forward, forcing the ill-equipped Dutch soldiers on the defensive. The entire Netherlands had been taken by surprise.

Two years after the German invasion – on 5th July 1942 – the now 13-year-old Anne Frank was lounging in a deckchair on her family's veranda enjoying the sun over Amsterdam when her sister, Margot, appeared.

"Father has received a call-up notice from the SS," she whispered worriedly. They both knew what that meant: being taken to a concentration camp.

"Of course, he's not going," Margot reassured her worried younger sister. Otto Frank had been preparing the family's escape for months.

"Mother's gone to Mr van Pels to ask whether we can move to our hiding place tomorrow. The van Pels are

»

16. Oct. 1942. Vrijdag.

een ontzettende uitschrijving. Later wals... en grappen dan hoe de lessen zijn.

2e deel. Anne met visite en op school. In het kamertje met Kitty en twee jongens waaronder Bernd aan theetafel bezig dan op school omringd door een storm van kinderen en allerlei dwaze tonelen b.v. in bed met vader en aan tafel.

körner gelezen, ik vind dat die man leuk schrijft.

Dit is een foto, zoals ik me zou wensen, altijd zo te zijn. Dan had ik nog wel een kans om naar Holywood te komen. Maar tegenwoordig zie ik er jammer genoeg meestal anders uit.

Annefrank.
10 Oct. 1942
Zondag.

ik weer wat filmsterren in de kamer opgehangen maar nu met fotohoekjes, dan kan ik ze er weer afhalen. Bep is gisteren naar de stad gegaan en heeft rokken voor Margot en mij gekocht. Maar ze moeten weer geruild, want ze passen niet helemaal.

ik het meestal, in plaats dat ik voor maar dat gaat wel over. Gisteren heb

Anne Frank confided all her secrets to her diary, which she called Kitty.

ALL OVER PRESS

For around two years, Anne Frank kept a diary. It provided a unique insight into both her and the Jewish struggle for survival in the occupied Netherlands.

ULLSTEIN BILD/ALL OVER PRESS

JUST ONE SURVIVED THE WAR

After the arrest, the Nazis sent the residents of the hideout to Auschwitz, where the families were separated. Of the annexe's eight residents, only Otto Frank survived. After the war, he settled in Basel, where he dedicated his life to the publication of Anne Frank's diary.

FRANK FAMILY

Otto Frank
★ 12.05.1889
† 19.08.1980
Survived Holocaust

Edith Frank
★ 16.01.1900
† 06.01.1945
Auschwitz-Birkenau

Margot Frank
★ 16.02.1926
† March 1945
Bergen-Belsen

Anne Frank
★ 12.06.1929
† March 1945
Bergen-Belsen

POLFOTO/ULLSTEIN/ALL OVER PRESS

VAN PELS FAMILY

Hermann van Pels
★ 31.03.1898
† September 1944
Auschwitz

Auguste van Pels
★ 29.09.1900
† April/May 1945
Theresienstadt

Peter van Pels
★ 09.11.1926
† 05.05.1945
Mauthausen

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DENTIST

Fritz Pfeffer
★ 30.04.1889
† 20.12.1944
Neuengamme

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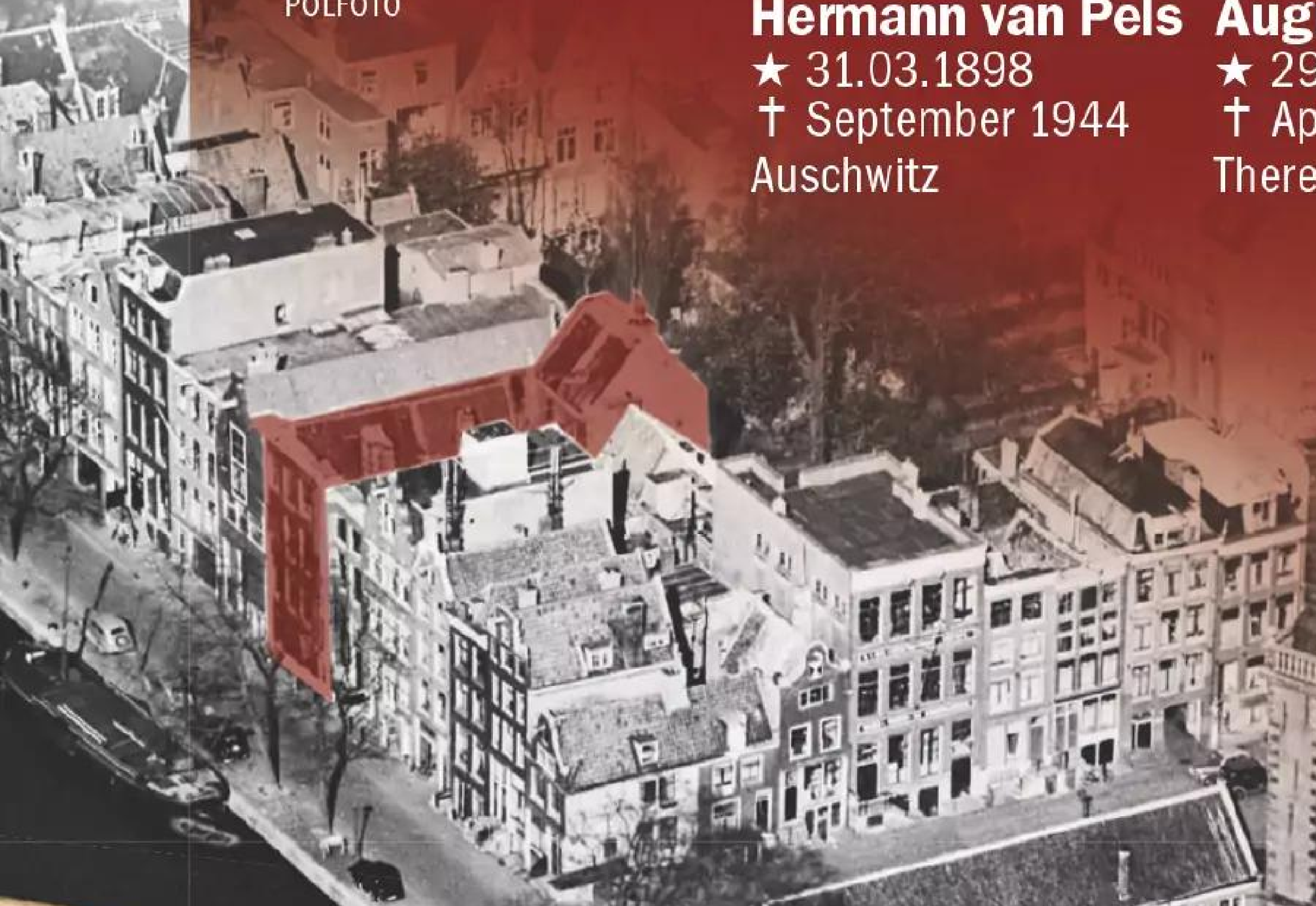
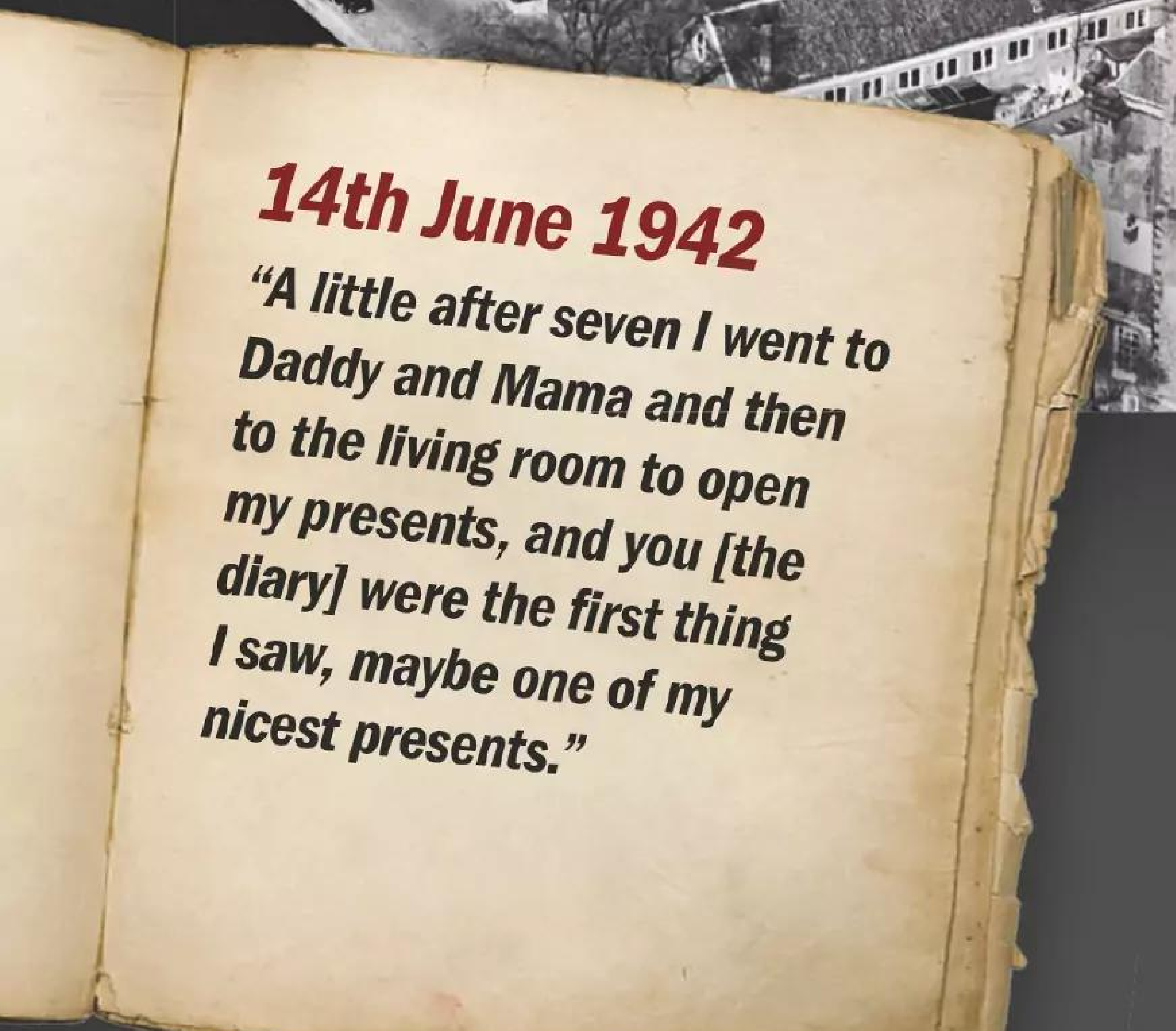


The Frank and van Pels families, and Fritz Pfeffer lived in the rear part of the marked building.

POLFOTO



14th June 1942

"A little after seven I went to Daddy and Mama and then to the living room to open my presents, and you [the diary] were the first thing I saw, maybe one of my nicest presents."

going with us. There will be seven of us altogether," continued Anne's sister.

When their mother came home soon after, the two girls were sent to their room so the adults could talk in peace. In the bedroom, Margot revealed that the call-up was not for their father after all, but for Margot herself.

"At this second shock I began to cry. Margot is 16 – apparently they want to send girls her age away on their own… Hiding – where would we hide? In the city? In the country? In a house? In a shack? Where, when, how…?" Anne asked herself in a daze as the news sank in. Frantically, the two girls started packing things in their school bags. The first thing Anne put in her bag was the diary she'd recently received as a birthday present. Meanwhile, her parents contacted their "Aryan" accomplices, who picked up clothes and food to be taken to the hiding place.

At dawn the next day, the family trudged through the rain towards their hideout. People rushing to work in the summer downpour gave the family sympathetic looks. The conspicuous yellow star that they had to wear spoke volumes. Anne was also wearing three pairs of trousers, a summer dress and both a winter and a summer jacket. The same went for the rest of the family, because no Jew dared be seen carrying a suitcase. They had left their home with the beds unmade and breakfast still on the table.

Anne's father and mother, Otto and Edith, led the way. For months, they had been taking as many of their belongings and clothes as possible to a hiding place in Otto Frank's business premises at 263 Prinsengracht. That's where they were going now. From the outside, the address housed the company Opekta, but on the second floor, a secret entrance hid an apartment in the rear building. The ground floor of the

Holocaust deniers: The diary is fake

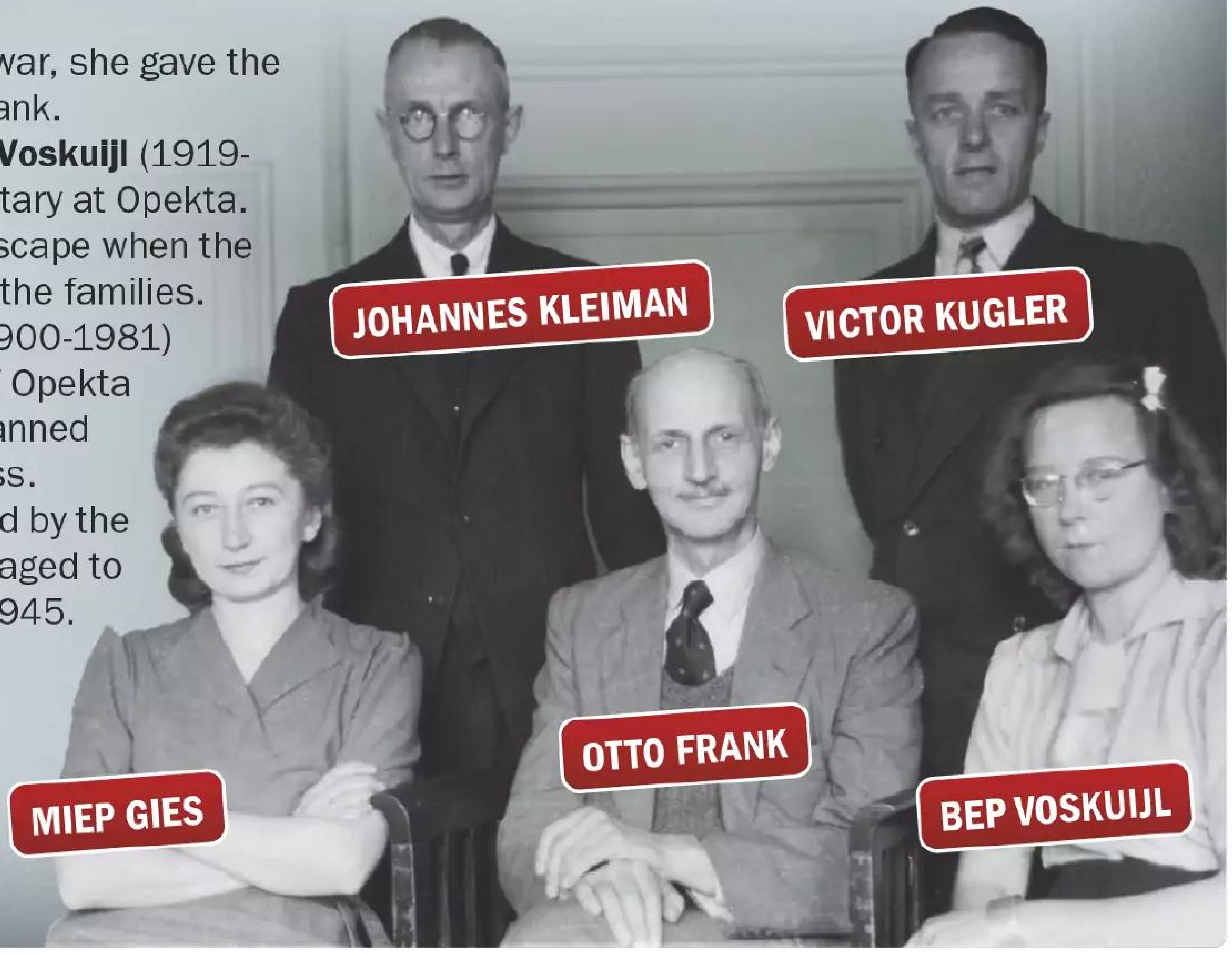
As early as the 1950s, the first critics began to question the veracity of the diary. It could not have been written by a child and had to be Jewish propaganda, they claimed.

Holocaust deniers such as David Irving and Robert Faurisson, among others, added their names to the accusations of forgery. When Anne's father, Otto Frank, died in 1980, he bequeathed the original diaries to the Dutch state, which set out to scientifically analyse the authenticity of the material. Both the writing and the type of paper were examined and the researchers were able to prove that Anne Frank had indeed written the diary.

FAMILIES' HELPERS SPREAD FALSE RUMOUR

Without the help of accomplices, the residents of the annexe could not have survived so long in hiding. Four employees of Otto Frank's company, Opekta, which produced ingredients for making jam, took care of taking food and clothing to the families. They also spread a false rumour that the families had fled to Belgium.

- **Johannes Kleiman** (1896-1959) was an accountant at Opekta. He was arrested in connection with the disclosure of the hideout, but released after six weeks due to poor health.
- **Miep Gies** (1909-2010), secretary at Opekta. When the Frank family was arrested, she sneaked to the hiding place and collected Anne Frank's writings. After the war, she gave the material to Otto Frank.
- **Elisabeth 'Bep' Voskuijl** (1919-1983) was a secretary at Opekta. She managed to escape when the Germans arrested the families.
- **Victor Kugler** (1900-1981) became director of Opekta when Jews were banned from doing business. Kugler was arrested by the Germans, but managed to escape in March 1945.



The accomplices helped spread Anne Frank's story after the war.
ALL OVER PRESS

hideout was reserved for the Frank family, while Hermann and Auguste van Pels and their son Peter would live on the floor above. In the attic, many months' worth of supplies were stored. Their new home was above Opekta's warehouse, but unlike the company's office staff, the warehouse workers were not told about the Jews upstairs hiding from the Nazis. Therefore, even the slightest noise was forbidden from morning to night. And even after hours, the families still had to be vigilant.

"We've forbidden Margot to cough at night, even though she has a bad cold, and are giving her large doses of codeine," Anne wrote in her diary.

Teenage rebellion began

Anne quickly got used to the hideout's somewhat monotonous daily routine of household chores, French grammar and "awful" maths problems.

"It is more like being on holiday in some strange pension," Anne wrote when she first went into hiding. But that soon changed. A teen rebellion against her mother, Edith, was slowly starting.

"I can't stand Mother. It's obvious that I'm a stranger to her; she doesn't even know what I think about the most ordinary things," a tearful Anne told her diary after a heated discussion about what the correct term for a servant was. One day in October 1942, Anne clashed with her mother again and the argument once more ended in tears.

"Finally I told Daddy that I'm much more fond of him than Mummy, to which he replied that I'd get over that. But I don't believe it." After spending three months with minimal privacy, Anne was easily irritated and quarrelled almost daily with either her mother or the van Pels family.

But every evening, the arguments were put on hold when the hidden annexe's residents tuned the radio to the BBC. The Gestapo were arresting Jews in their hundreds, the announcer said. "We assume that most of them are being murdered. The English radio says they're being gassed," wrote Anne. When she pushed the blackout curtain aside, she could see crying children and their parents being ordered in a line "by a handful of men who bully and beat them until they nearly drop".

Another fugitive moved in

Due to the awful situation of the Jews outside, the Frank and van Pels families decided in November 1942 to take in an eighth resident. They chose Fritz Pfeffer, a Jewish dentist married to a Christian. "Great news!" said Anne, who would have to share her room with this man. He supposedly got along with children, but just ten days later, she couldn't stand the sight of Pfeffer; he was obviously

Frank family fled Germany

Anne Frank spent the first years of her life in the German city of Frankfurt. But when Hitler came to power in 1933, Otto Frank accepted an offer to manage the Amsterdam branch of Opekta and moved to the Netherlands.

Otto Frank's father was a wealthy banker who had worked hard to climb the social ladder in Germany. After his death, almost all his money was lost and post-WWI inflation took the last of it. But that didn't deter Otto Frank from trying to establish a bank in 1923, which eventually failed.

Anne's mother, Edith, also grew up in a relatively prosperous German home.

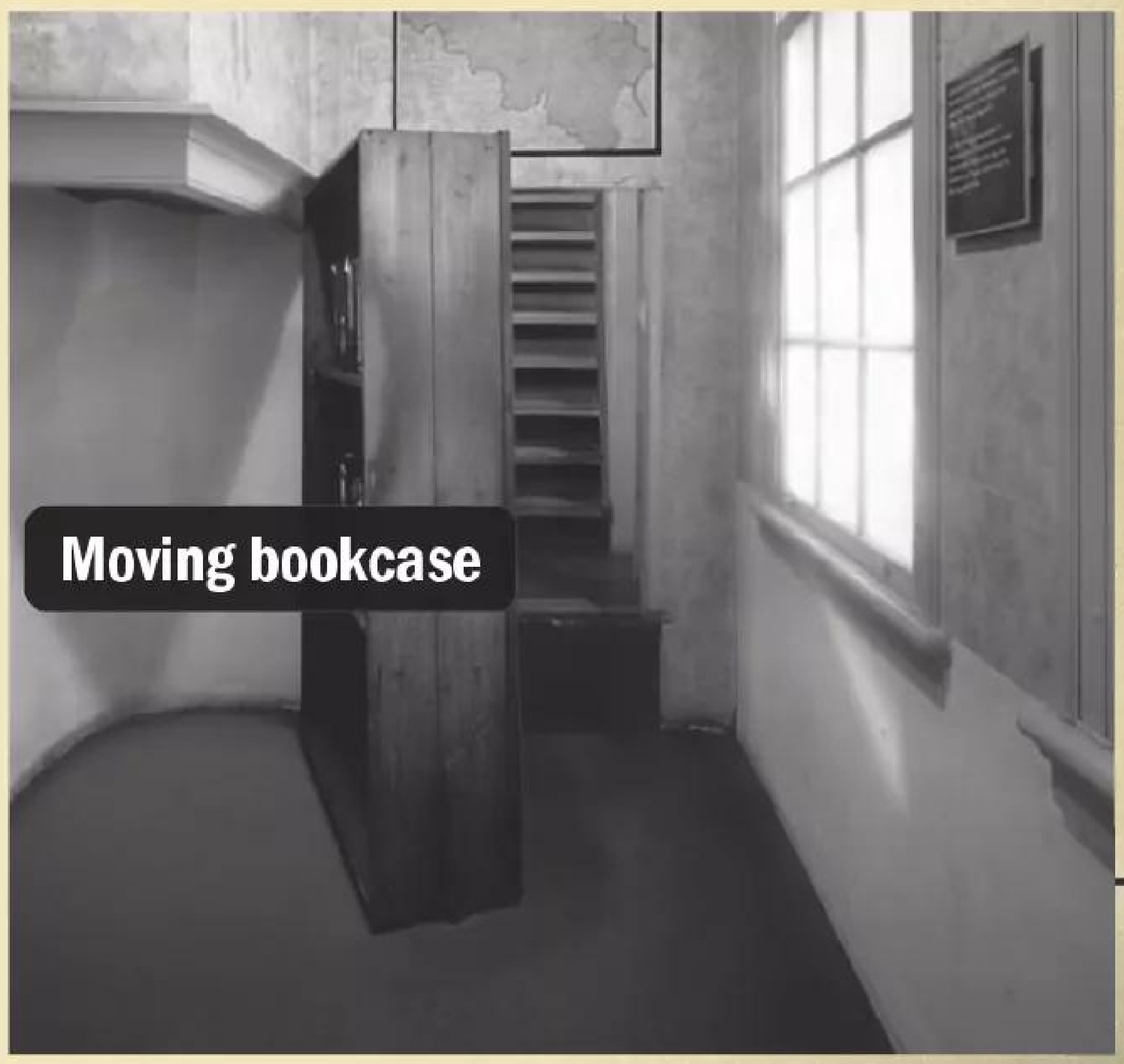
8th May 1944

"Father was extremely well bred, and he had to laugh yesterday because for the first time in his 55 years, he scraped out the frying pan at the table."

BOOKCASE HID ENTRANCE TO ANNEXE

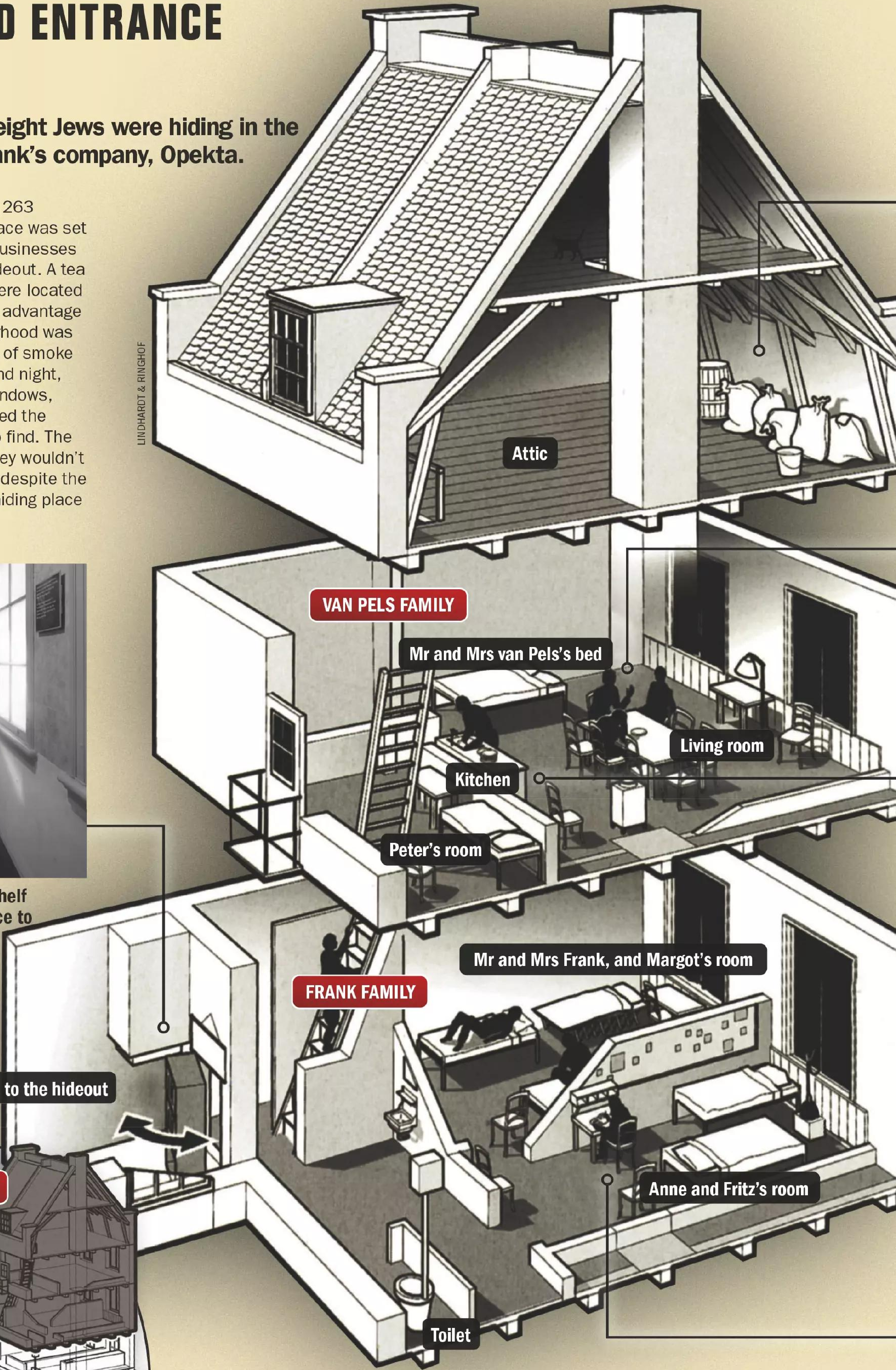
Few people knew that eight Jews were hiding in the rear building of Otto Frank's company, Opekta.

In July 1942, the families fled to 263 Prinsengracht, where a hiding place was set up in the rear building. Several businesses were in the same area as the hideout. A tea company and a furniture store were located next to the families' shelter. The advantage of being in a business neighbourhood was that no one would be suspicious of smoke coming from the chimney. Day and night, blackout curtains covered the windows, and a moving bookcase completed the illusion that there was nothing to find. The residents had to stay quiet so they wouldn't be heard. Anne Frank wrote that despite the damp and the wonky walls, the hiding place was very comfortable.

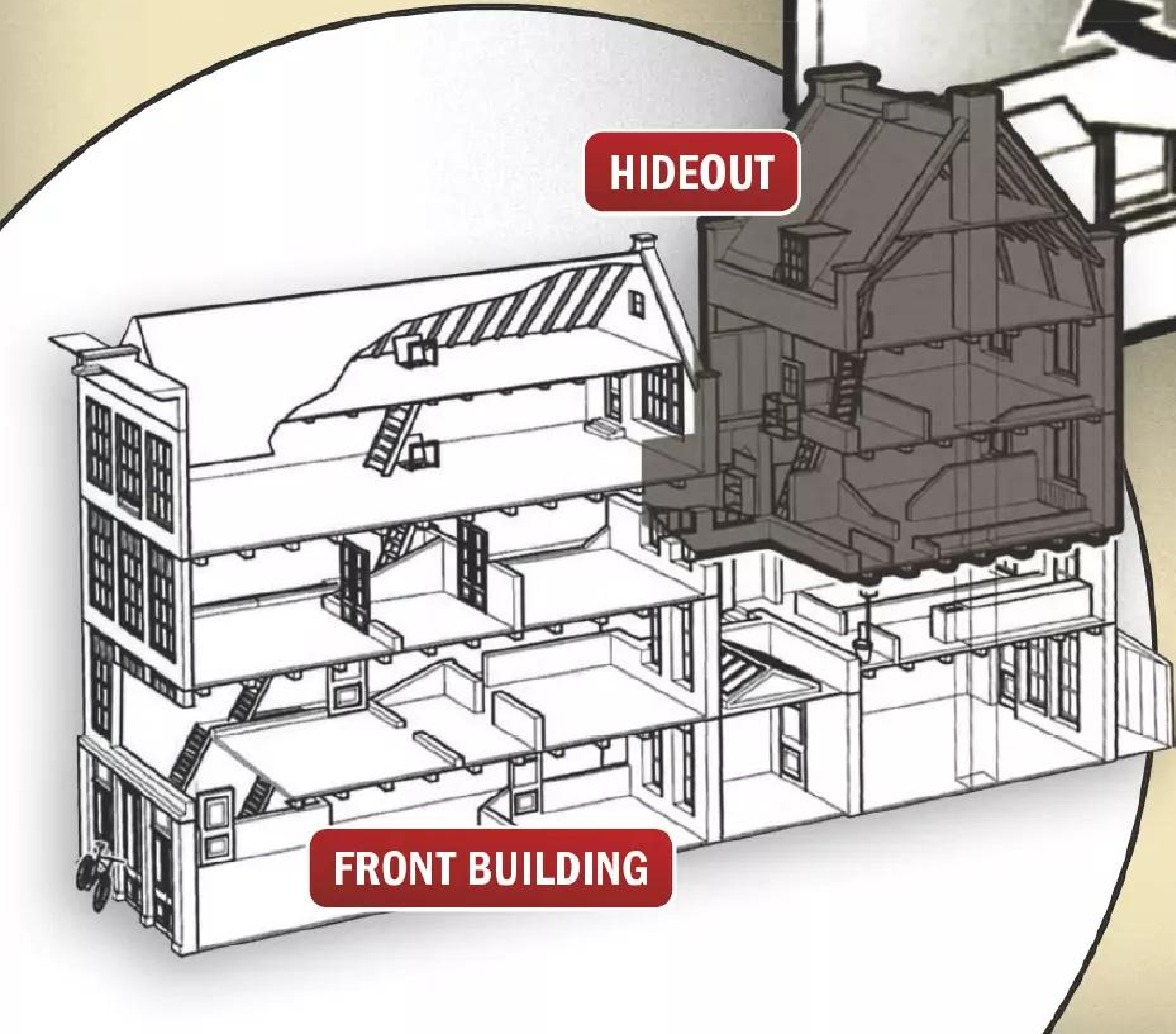

Moving bookcase

In August 1942, a moving bookshelf was installed to hide the entrance to the rear building.

ALL OVER PRESS

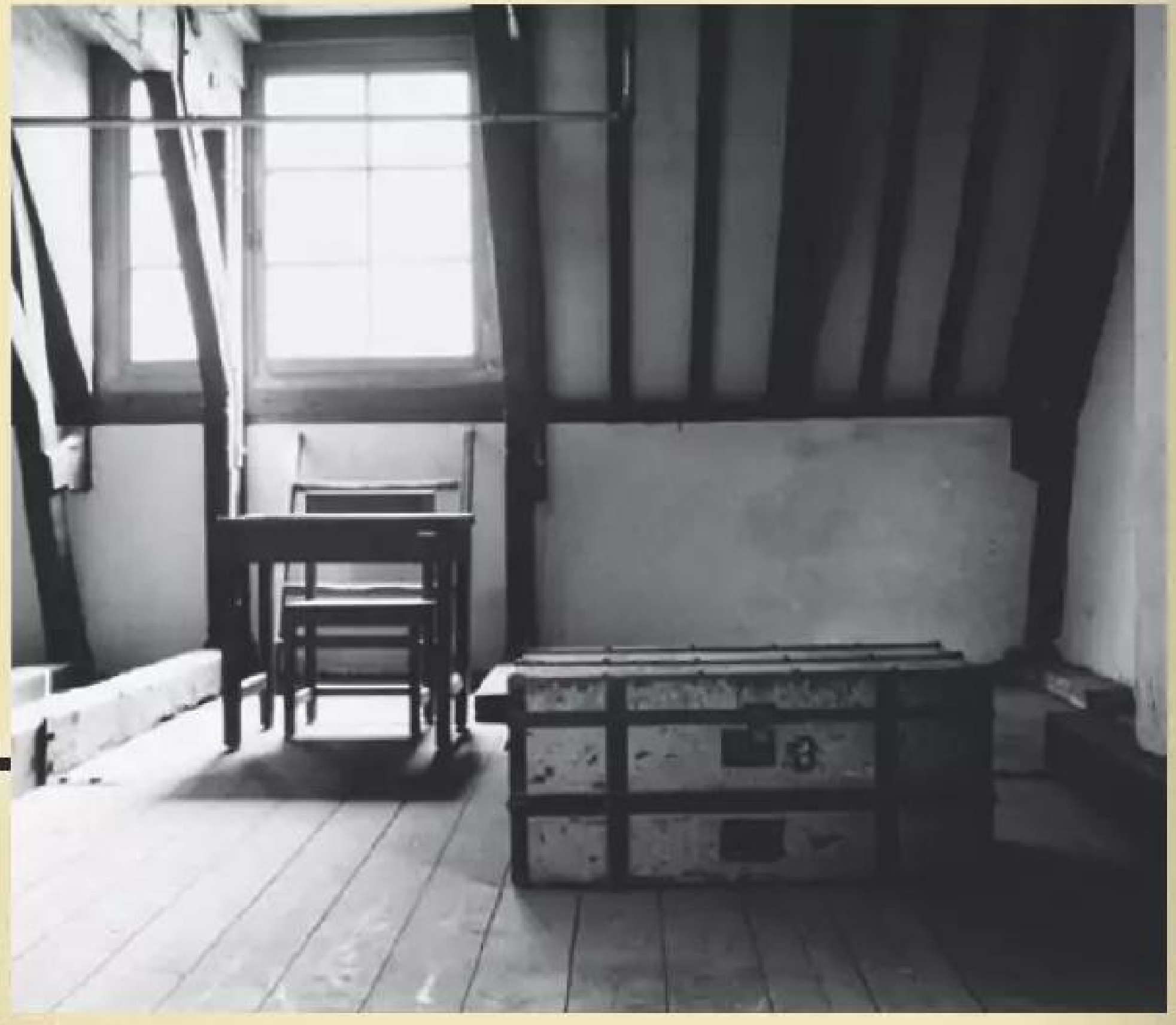

Attic
VAN PELS FAMILY
Mr and Mrs van Pels's bed
Living room
Kitchen
Peter's room
Mr and Mrs Frank, and Margot's room
FRANK FAMILY
Entrance to the hideout
Anne and Fritz's room
Toilet

LINDHARDT & RINGHOF


HIDEOUT
FRONT BUILDING

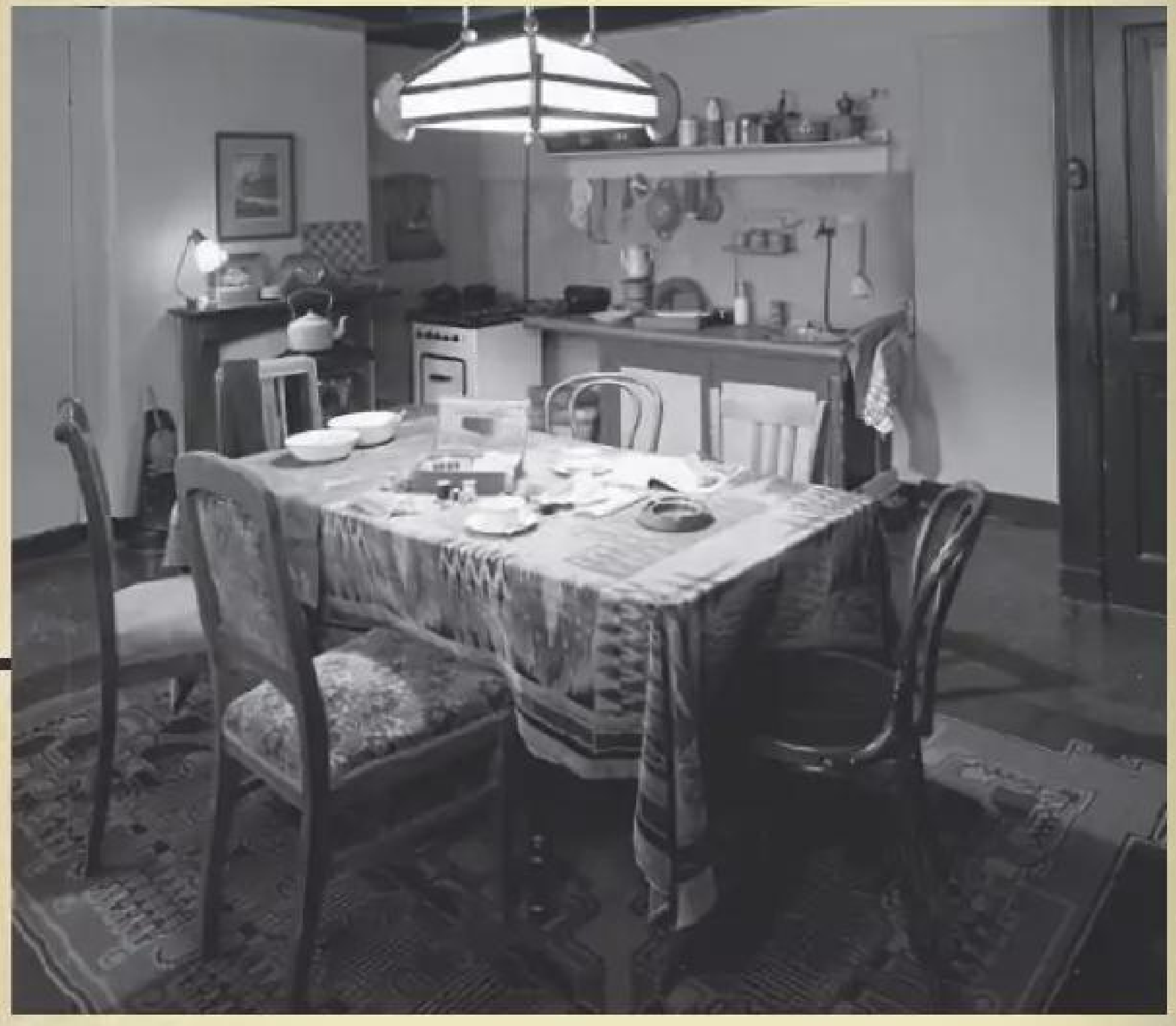
In the front building, Otto Frank's company, Opekta, maintained a respectable facade.

LINDHARDT & RINGHOF



The attic was where the families stored the supplies that their accomplices took to the rear building.

SCANPIX/GRANGER



Anne Frank regularly came into conflict with the other residents of the house in the living room.

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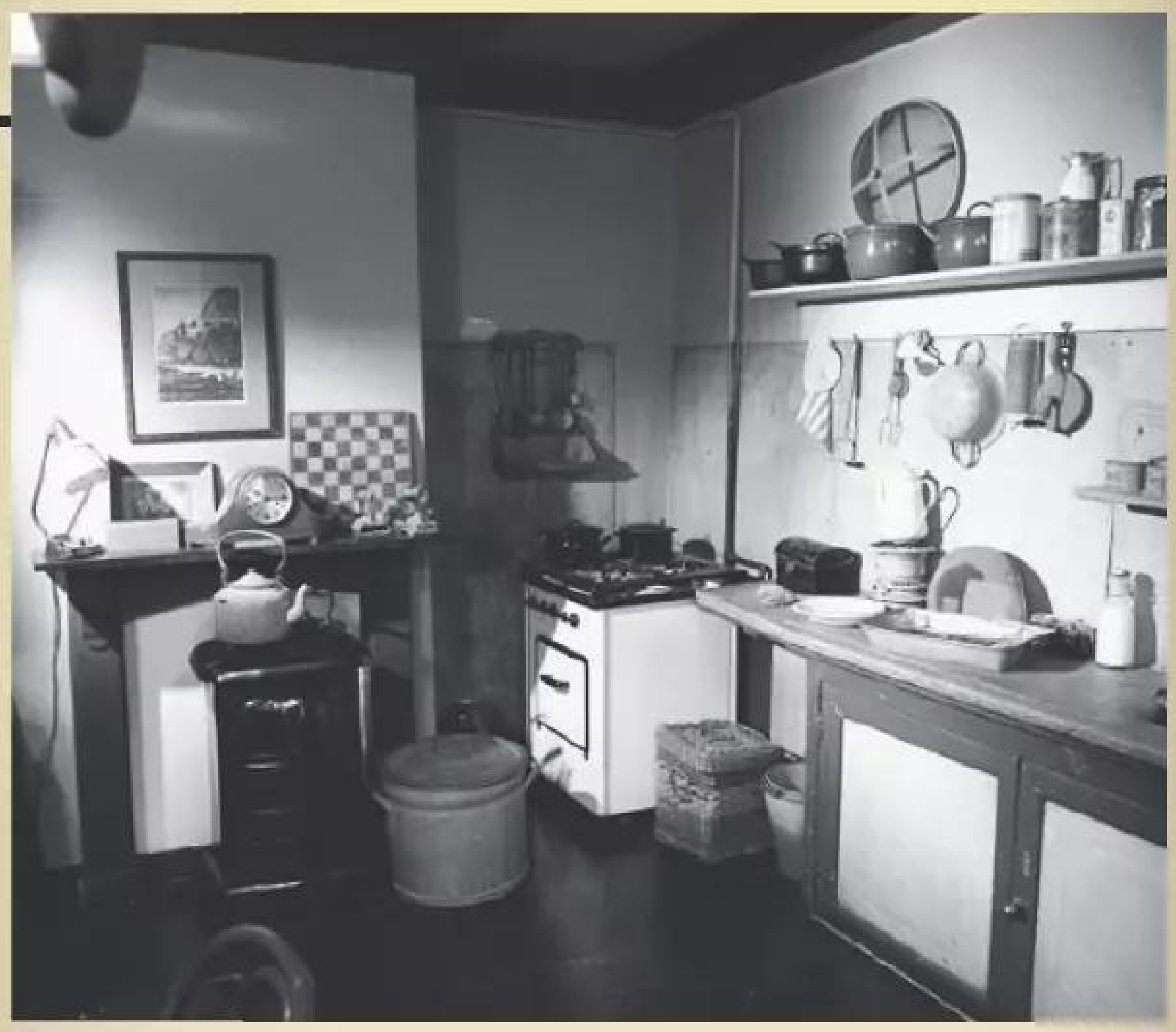

Mr and Mrs van Pels's room was used as a communal kitchen and living room.

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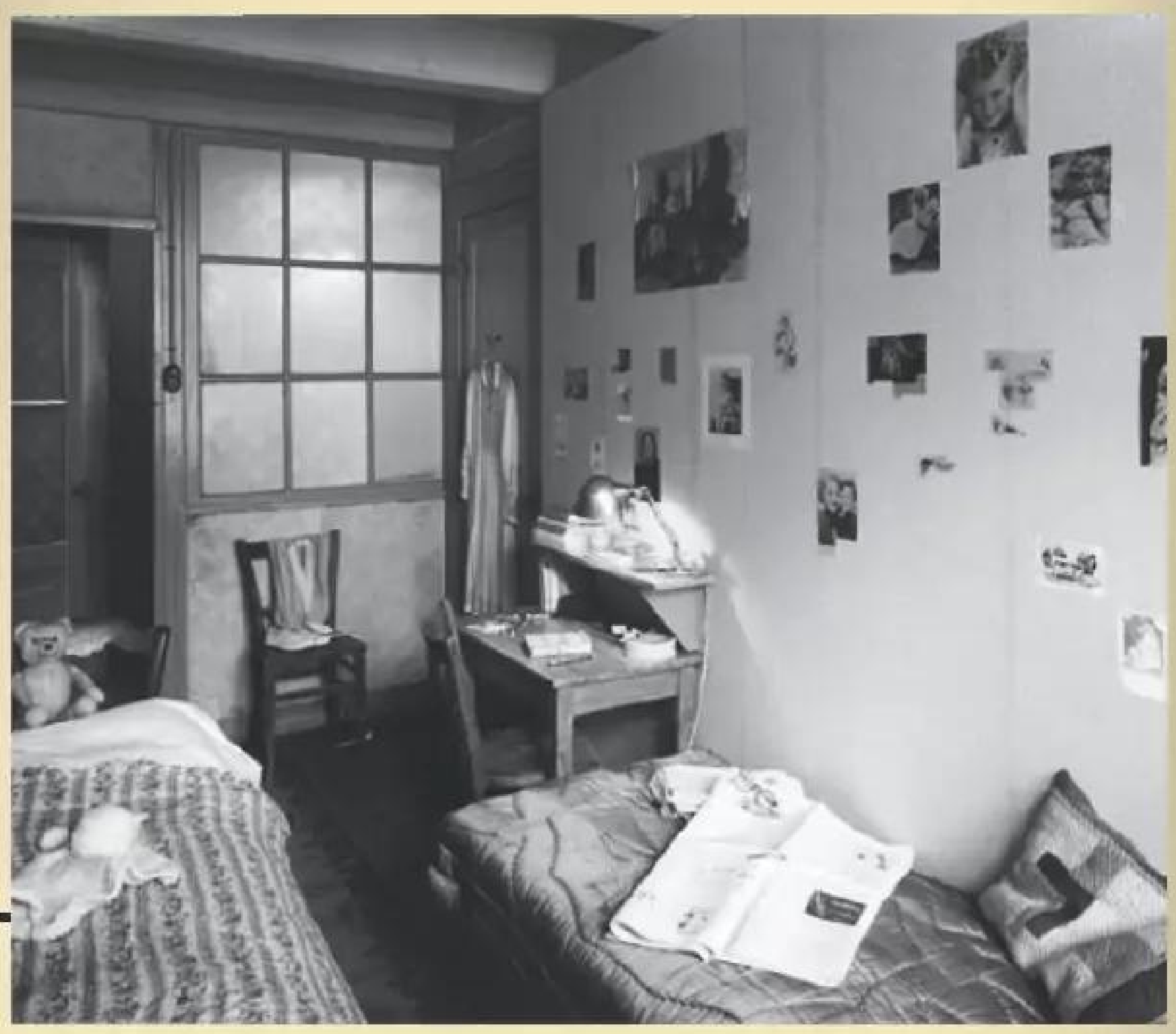


Anne Frank shared a small room with the dentist Fritz Pfeffer, whom she hated.

ALL OVER PRESS

not teen-friendly. According to Anne, he was an "old-fashioned disciplinarian and preacher of unbearably long sermons on manners".

"This wouldn't be so bad if Mr Pfeffer weren't such a telltale and hadn't singled out Mother to be the recipient of his reports," Anne wrote furiously after yet another clash. Even at night, there was strife between the two. Mr Pfeffer shushed Anne and she shushed the snoring Pfeffer, who she thought sounded like a fish gasping for air.

If it wasn't Pfeffer keeping Anne awake, it was the Allied bombers, making a deafening noise almost every night.

"I still haven't got over my fear of aeroplanes and shooting, and crawl into Father's bed nearly every night for comfort," wrote Anne, shaking with fear and begging her father to light a candle in the darkness. But she soon realised that the families' safety was more important than having candlelight to calm her anxiety. On 27th April 1943, the British firebombed Amsterdam again, hitting the German officers' club, Offiziersheim, while elsewhere in the city, the 13-year-old girl lay sleepless.

"I have bags under my eyes from lack of sleep," wrote Anne, who took the herbal medicine valerian every day for anxiety and depression. She also had little opportunity to boost her flagging energy levels during the day. In the spring of 1943, the fugitives' daily menu consisted of unbuttered bread, spinach and large potatoes with a sweet, rotten taste.

D-Day brought celebrations

Finally, in September 1943, good news arrived from the outside world: Italy and the fascist Mussolini had surrendered unconditionally. To the sound of 'God Save the King', the American national anthem and the Russian 'Internationale', jubilation broke out in the rear building.

Outside, despite the good news from Italy, there was little cause for celebration, however. At the end of September 1943, Amsterdam was declared Jew-free, according to the Nazis, and thousands of Dutch Jews

»

DUTCH JEWS AT THEIR MERCY

GETTY

During the war, the Nazis killed over 75 per cent – more than 100,000 – of Dutch Jews in the death camps. Out of all of Europe, the extermination of Jews was most efficient in the Netherlands.

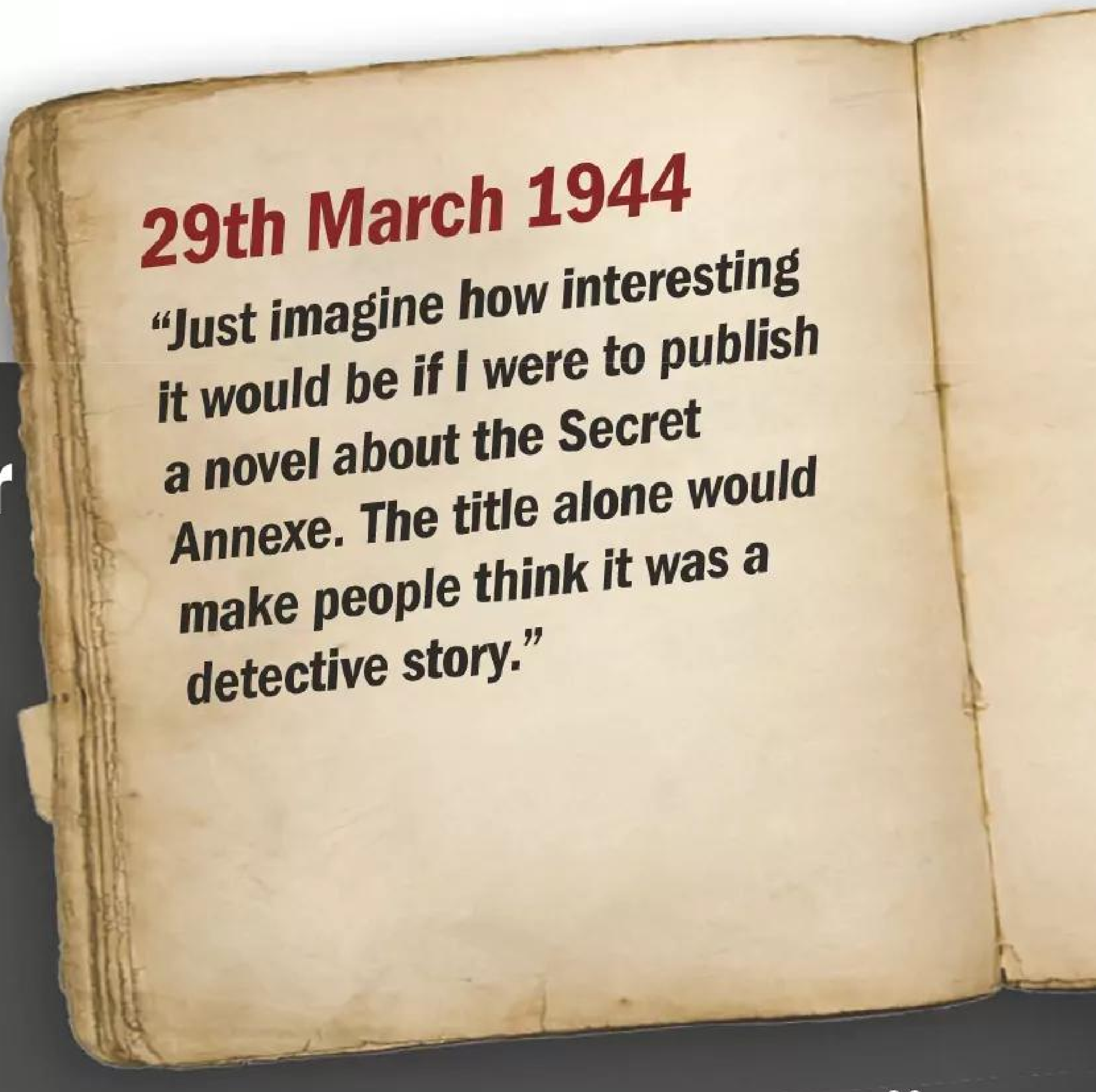
This was possible because the Nazis received help from a number of prominent Jews.

On German orders, the Joodsche Raad (Jewish Council) was formed in February 1941 to govern the Jewish people. The council helped the Germans select Jews to be sent to the death camps in the East, for example. The council itself was safe from that fate – for a while.

Later, the Germans arrested the Joodsche Raad and its members, and sent them to the death camps, too. They had been convinced that their policy of co-operation would ease conditions for Jews in the Netherlands. The deportation of Dutch Jews to the death camps continued until September 1944.

Anne wanted to be a writer

Initially, Anne Frank only kept a diary for herself. But later she heard the minister of education in the Dutch government-in-exile announce on the radio that all testimonies about the suffering of the population would be collected and published after the war. Anne immediately began improving the diary so it could be published.



29th March 1944

"Just imagine how interesting it would be if I were to publish a novel about the Secret Annexe. The title alone would make people think it was a detective story."

British soldiers were horrified by the sight that greeted them at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp where Anne Frank died.

SCANPIX/GRANGER

had already been sent to the horrific extermination camps or were waiting to go to Westerbork transit camp – the last stop for Dutch Jews before the death camps. Soon, Anne Frank would also be in a cattle truck bound for Auschwitz. But on 6th June 1944, such a situation seemed unimaginable when the BBC began its radio broadcast with the words, "This is London Calling … The invasion has begun!"

The news was initially received with scepticism in the annexe, but when the radio repeatedly relayed the news and General Eisenhower finally announced on the radio that, "This is D-Day. Stiff fighting will come now, but after this the victory," euphoria finally set in.

> "I still haven't got over my fear of aeroplanes and shooting, and crawl into Father's bed"

"Friends are on the way," wrote 14-year-old Anne in her diary, and Margot told her that she might be able to return to school in September.

Anne couldn't wait to get out of the annexe, because she felt outnumbered by scornful, bad-tempered people, who found her disagreeable. She was also sick and tired of having to listen to their advice.

"Believe me, I'd like to listen, but it doesn't work, because if I'm quiet and serious, everyone thinks I'm putting on a new act and I have to save myself with a joke … [I] keep trying to find a way to become what I'd like to be and what I could be if only there were no other people in the world," she complained on 1st August 1944. Those were the last words she wrote.

SS stormed Anne Frank's hideout

When a car pulled up in front of 263 Prinsengracht on 4th August, Otto Frank was in the middle of giving Peter van Pels an English lesson.

"Double is spelled with only one b," he admonished the boy as he heard

30th October 1943

"I cling to Father because my contempt of Mother is growing daily and it's only through him that I'm able to retain the last ounce of family feeling."

Otto Frank censored the diary

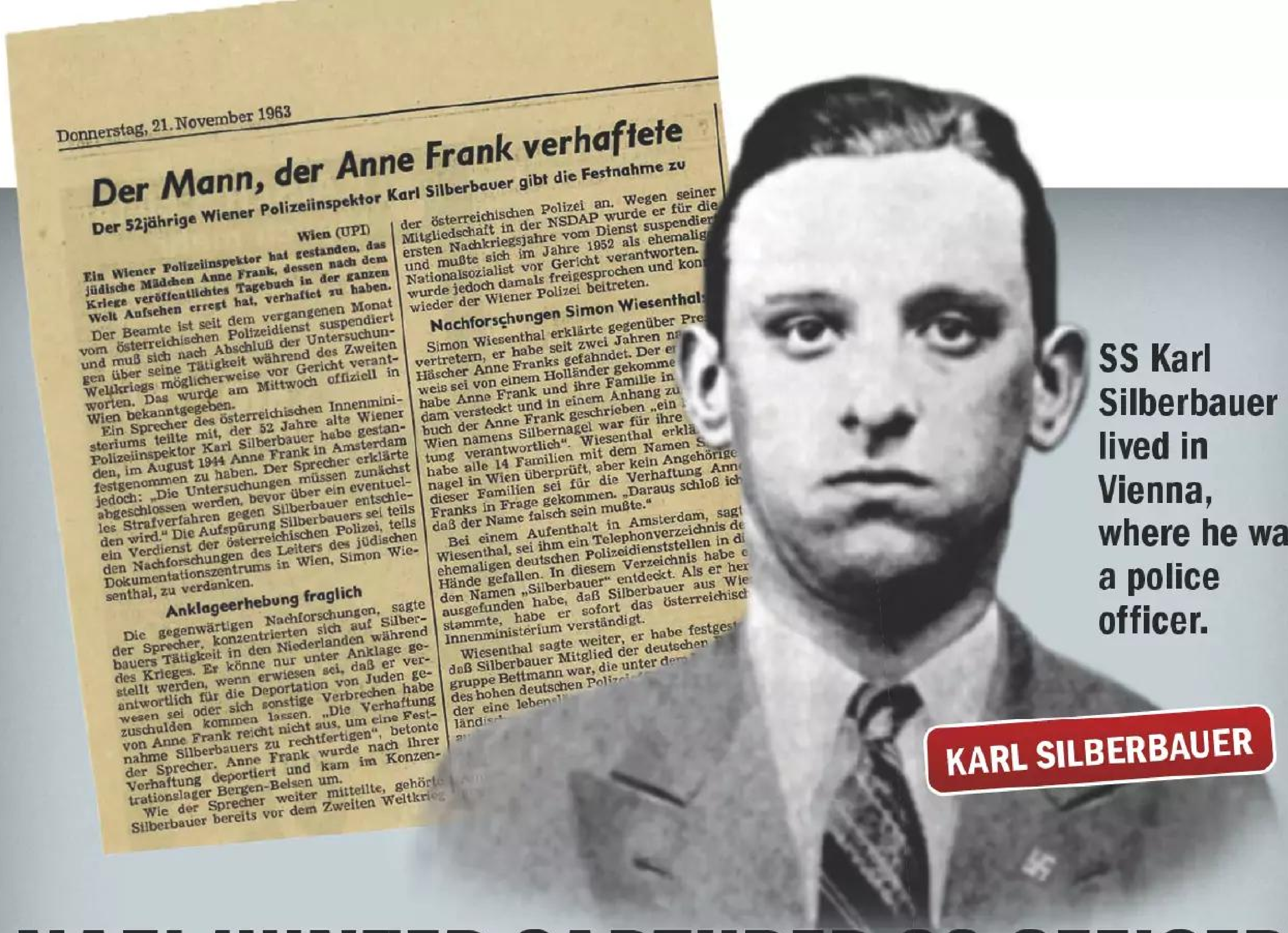
Anne Frank's writings about her budding sexuality were too much for her father, Otto Frank, who censored the morally objectionable descriptions before the diary was first published in 1947. Like any teenager, Anne Frank was curious about sex, and she wrote quite a lot about the subject. Anne Frank's angry outbursts against her mother and others were also removed to preserve the memory of Edith Frank and those in the annexe with whom they had shared their fate. Anne Frank often wrote disparagingly about her mother, but also expressed shame about it. Only after Otto Frank's death in 1980 was the uncensored diary published.

footsteps on the stairs. The next thing they knew, a plain-clothes policeman burst in with his gun drawn, and ordered them downstairs, where Anne and the five other residents of the hideout were already standing with their hands in the air. There was no doubt that they had been betrayed, because the police were very well informed – they knew, for instance, that the moving bookcase in the hallway hid the entrance to the hideout.

SS-Oberscharführer Karl Josef Silberbauer was standing in the living room. He ordered all valuables to be handed over immediately, and Otto Frank had to show him where they were kept. They then waited several hours for a vehicle large enough to accommodate all eight of them, which would transport them to Westerbork – the Dutch transit camp for Jews.

On 3rd September 1944, one of the war's last Jewish transports departed from Westerbork for Auschwitz, where around 1.1 million Jews lost their lives. Anne Frank was listed on the transport list as Jew number 309, born on 12th June 1929, "unemployed".

When the Red Army reached Auschwitz at the end of January 1945, the soldiers found only around 7,000 survivors – all starving, filthy and lice-infested. Anne Frank was not among them. Three months earlier, she and Margot had been moved from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen, where a typhus epidemic broke out and killed both sisters. Anne died in early March 1945 – aged 15 – and is probably buried in a mass grave. Only a few weeks after Anne's death – on 12th April 1945 – the concentration camp was liberated by British soldiers, who were met by a distressing sight. Around 55,000 starving and sick prisoners drifted around the camp, which emitted the stench of thousands of unburied bodies.



Donnerstag, 21. November 1963

Der Mann, der Anne Frank verhaftete

Der 52jährige Wiener Polizeiinspektor Karl Silberbauer gibt die Festnahme zu

Wien (UPI)

Ein Wiener Polizeiinspektor hat gestanden, das jüdische Mädchen Anne Frank, dessen nach dem Kriege veröffentlichtes Tagebuch in der ganzen Welt Aufsehen erregt hat, verhaftet zu haben.

Der Beamte ist seit dem vergangenen Monat vom österreichischen Polizeidienst suspendiert und muß sich nach Abschluß der Untersuchungen über seine Tätigkeit während des Zweiten Weltkriegs möglicherweise vor Gericht verantworten. Das wurde am Mittwoch offiziell in Wien bekanntgegeben.

Ein Sprecher des österreichischen Innenministeriums teilte mit, der 52 Jahre alte Wiener Polizeiinspektor Karl Silberbauer habe gestanden, im August 1944 Anne Frank in Amsterdam festgenommen zu haben. Der Sprecher erklärte jedoch: „Die Untersuchungen müssen zunächst abgeschlossen werden, bevor über ein eventuelles Strafverfahren gegen Silberbauer entschieden wird." Die Aufspürung Silberbauers sei teils ein Verdienst der österreichischen Polizei, teils den Nachforschungen des Leiters des jüdischen Dokumentationszentrums in Wien, Simon Wiesenthal, zu verdanken.

Anklageerhebung fraglich

Die gegenwärtigen Nachforschungen, sagte der Sprecher, konzentrierten sich auf Silberbauers Tätigkeit in den Niederlanden während des Krieges. Er könne nur unter Anklage gestellt werden, wenn erwiesen sei, daß er verantwortlich für die Deportation von Juden gewesen sei oder sich sonstige Verbrechen habe zuschulden kommen lassen. „Die Verhaftung von Anne Frank reicht nicht aus, um eine Festnahme Silberbauers zu rechtfertigen", betonte der Sprecher. Anne Frank wurde nach ihrer Verhaftung deportiert und kam im Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen um.

Wie der Sprecher weiter mitteilte, gehörte Silberbauer bereits vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg der österreichischen Polizei an. Wegen seiner Mitgliedschaft in der NSDAP wurde er für die ersten Nachkriegsjahre vom Dienst suspendier
und mußte sich im Jahre 1952 als ehemalig
Nationalsozialist vor Gericht verantworten.
wurde jedoch damals freigesprochen und kon
wieder der Wiener Polizei beitreten.

Nachforschungen Simon Wiesenthal

Simon Wiesenthal erklärte gegenüber Pre
vertretern, er habe seit zwei Jahren na
Häscher Anne Franks gefahndet. Der e
weis sei von einem Holländer gekomme
habe Anne Frank und ihre Familie in
dam versteckt und in einem Anhang zu
buch der Anne Frank geschrieben „ein
Wien namens Silbernagel war für ihre
tung verantwortlich". Wiesenthal erklä
habe alle 14 Familien mit dem Namen S
nagel in Wien überprüft, aber kein Angehörig
dieser Familien sei für die Verhaftung Ann
Franks in Frage gekommen. „Daraus schloß ich
daß der Name falsch sein mußte."

Bei einem Aufenthalt in Amsterdam, sagt
Wiesenthal, sei ihm ein Telephonverzeichnis de
ehemaligen deutschen Polizeidienststellen in di
Hände gefallen. In diesem Verzeichnis habe e
den Namen „Silberbauer" entdeckt. Als er her
ausgefunden habe, daß Silberbauer aus Wie
stammte, habe er sofort das österreichisch
Innenministerium verständigt.

Wiesenthal sagte weiter, er habe festges
daß Silberbauer Mitglied der deutschen
gruppe Bettmann war, die unter de
des hohen deutschen Polizei
der eine lebens
ländis

SS Karl Silberbauer lived in Vienna, where he was a police officer.

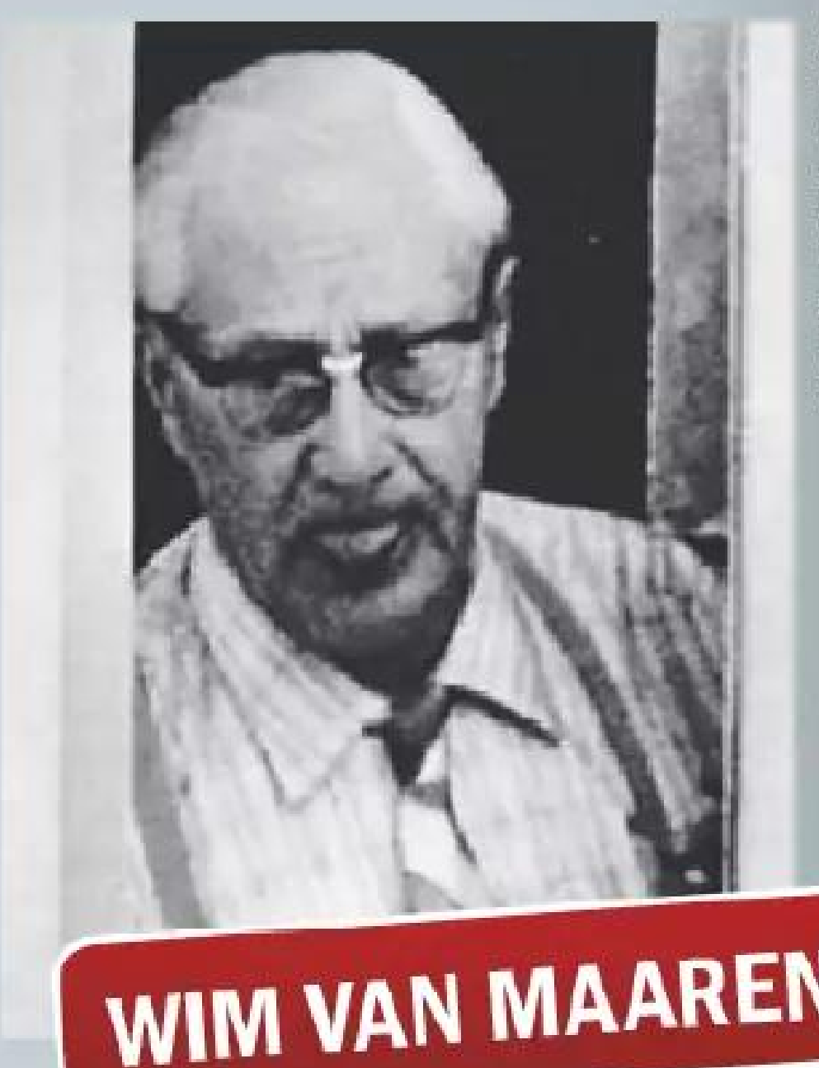
KARL SILBERBAUER

NAZI HUNTER CAPTURED SS OFFICER

After two years of searching, Simon Wiesenthal found the man who had arrested the Frank and van Pels families.

In 1963, Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal managed to track down Karl Josef Silberbauer – the former SS *Oberscharführer* who had arrested Anne Frank and her family. Silberbauer was living in Vienna, where he had a respectable job as a policeman. Soon after, Silberbauer was suspended from the police force and the press laid siege to his home. Silberbauer claimed to journalists that he had told Otto Frank, "You have a lovely daughter." However, the former SS man could not provide any new information about who had betrayed the Frank and van Pels families.

Betrayer was never found



ALL OVER PRESS

WIM VAN MAAREN

The police officers who arrested the families were so well informed that someone must have revealed their hiding place. Yet no one has ever discovered who the traitor was. Wim van Maaren, a worker in the Opekta warehouse on the floor below the hideout, had to defend himself in two court cases against accusations that he was the person who had betrayed the family. Both times, he was cleared. During the hearings, van Maaren admitted that he'd had a hunch that something was going on. But he certainly wasn't the only one who noticed the large supplies of food that occasionally found their way to 263 Prinsengracht. The Nazis paid *kopgeld* (a bounty) to anyone who turned in Jews, so plenty of people may have been tempted to make a quick buck in the impoverished Netherlands.

Anne Frank was controversial among Dutch Jews

After the war, Anne Frank came to symbolise the fate of six million Jews under the Nazi terror regime.

But for a long time in her native Netherlands, she was a problematic figure in the Jewish community.

Among the Dutch Jews who survived the war, she was far from popular. Many felt that Anne Frank got too much attention and overshadowed the equally terrible fate of thousands of others.

The literary world also kept her at a distance for a long time – possibly deterred by the tourist industry around the Prinsengracht house, which attracts around half a million visitors annually.

27th March 1943

"Rauter, some German bigwig, recently gave a speech: 'All Jews must be out of the German-occupied territories before 1st July.' These poor people are being shipped off to filthy slaughterhouses like a herd of sick and neglected cattle. But I'll say no more on the subject. My own thoughts give me nightmares."

50,000 desperate women fought a daily battle for survival in Ravensbrück.

GETTY IMAGES & SHAWSHOTS/ALAMY/IMAGESELECT

Ravensbrück – the women-only concentration camp:

PRISONERS WORKED TO DEATH

Sadistic guards, gruelling work and fellow prisoners who attacked, stole food and were informants for the Nazis. For the female prisoners in the concentration camp north of Berlin, every day was a struggle for survival. They were forced to work for the Nazi war machine until they collapsed in the dirt.

By Troels Ussing

The lines of women seemed to go on for ever in Ravensbrück's *Appellplatz,* the yard where the concentration camp prisoners gathered twice a day for roll call. Like ghostly skeletons in tattered clothing, the female captives stood close together on that dark autumn morning in 1944. Most were so emaciated that if one of them fell over, the whole row risked toppling like dominoes.

In the large assembly area, uniformed female guards strode about, counting the prisoners. The guards' black boots crunched into the gravel with every step they took, and several of the Germans had to hold on tightly to their ferociously barking German Shepherds, which were ready to sink their teeth into the skeletal prisoners.

After a few months in Ravensbrück, 46-year-old Sunneva Sandø – prisoner number 75,310 – had learned that the smallest mistake would lead to severe punishment, and the Danish-Faroese woman knew that no morning roll call went by without rage-fuelled outbursts from the guards.

That morning was no exception. When a guard noticed a gap in the rows of women from Sunneva's barrack, there was a flurry of abuse as the guard swung her palm towards the nearest prisoners. Sunneva escaped being slapped, but the Dane was among the small group ordered to immediately retrieve the missing prisoner – meanwhile, everyone else in the yard had to remain in their rows, as frequently happened during the often hour-long roll calls.

Inside the barrack, the missing woman lay in her bunk, dead after several days of illness. But Sunneva and her barrack mates knew they couldn't return empty-handed. So, they carried the dead woman to the Appellplatz, where they managed to » stand the body on its feet. By clamping the corpse between them, it was almost miraculously able to stand upright between the prisoners. The female guard failed to notice the deception.

"The gap was filled, the row was in order – that was all that was required for the roll call," as Sunneva Sandø wrote in her memoirs just after the war.

The Dane, who was in Ravensbrück because she'd helped the French Resistance, would not have to receive a taste of the guards' whips this time. However, she'd undergone plenty of horrors in Ravensbrück, and the daily struggle to survive was by no means over. In the Nazis' only women's camp, death was a frequent visitor. Survival there required appalling cynicism, as everyone knew that humanity was a luxury that could cost you your life.

Women from all over occupied Europe were crammed on to trains and sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp north of Berlin. More than 130,000 were sent there from 1939-1945.

GETTY IMAGES

Himmler wanted a women's camp

Six years earlier, SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler had been planning how the Third Reich would deal with the thousands of women the Nazis had put behind bars for law-breaking and inappropriate behaviour. By 1938, Germany's female prisons were full and the costs were enormous. The Nazis needed a cheaper solution.

Himmler decided to build a concentration camp for women only. There, the inmates would be forced to work and thus generate income for the Nazis. Everyone from petty thieves, prostitutes and convicted criminals to Jews and political opponents would be placed in the special women's camp – and in time, resistance fighters like Sunneva Sandø would follow suit.

For Himmler, the small town of Ravensbrück, 90 kilometres north of Berlin, was an ideal location, because it would be easy for the Nazi elite to visit the camp to inspect it. As early as autumn 1938, male concentration camp prisoners from Sachsenhausen broke ground for the new camp. For six months, the men hammered and sawed until a four-metre-high barrier of barbed wire and electric fencing surrounded an area the size of six football pitches.

When the first buses carrying prisoners rolled towards the women's camp in May 1939, the passengers were optimistic about their future. The road to Ravensbrück led through green pine forests and past the idyllic Schwedtsee lake, its surface sparkling in the sunlight. But when the bus doors opened outside the concentration camp, anything but an idyll awaited.

"A stream of orders and insults greeted us as we began to descend. Hordes of women appeared through the trees – guards in skirts, blouses and caps, holding whips, some with yelping dogs rushing at the buses through the trees," recalled a German communist who was among the first 974 women in the new camp.

The prisoners had just encountered one of the camp's hallmarks – the sadistic female guards who were employed for just one thing: to make the inmates work until they dropped dead in the camp's brutal labour hell.

Dogs were trained to attack

The prisoners' spirits sank further as guards herded them through Ravensbrück's iron gate and into the Appellplatz.

"*Achtung, Achtung.* Ranks of five. Hands by your sides. Nose to the front," shouted the guards. They used terms

NAZIS LURED WOMEN TO BROTHELS

In 1942, Himmler had a particularly despicable idea: he wanted to reward hard-working male concentration camp prisoners with a visit to a brothel. He believed that the opportunity for sex would "encourage the men to work better", so "special blocks" were built in concentration camps.

The new initiative cost the Nazis nothing, because the prostitutes were taken from Ravensbrück. The women volunteered for the job because the Nazis promised them better food, their own rooms, nice clothes and, most importantly, release after six months.

The first brothel opened in the Mauthausen concentration camp in June 1942. By the end of the war, nine more had opened. More than 200 women worked there – but they didn't earn their freedom. Most had to carry on for years. Only when their venereal diseases could no longer be hidden were the women released. However, the journey was not to freedom, but back to Ravensbrück.

The Nazis opened brothels in 10 concentration camps.

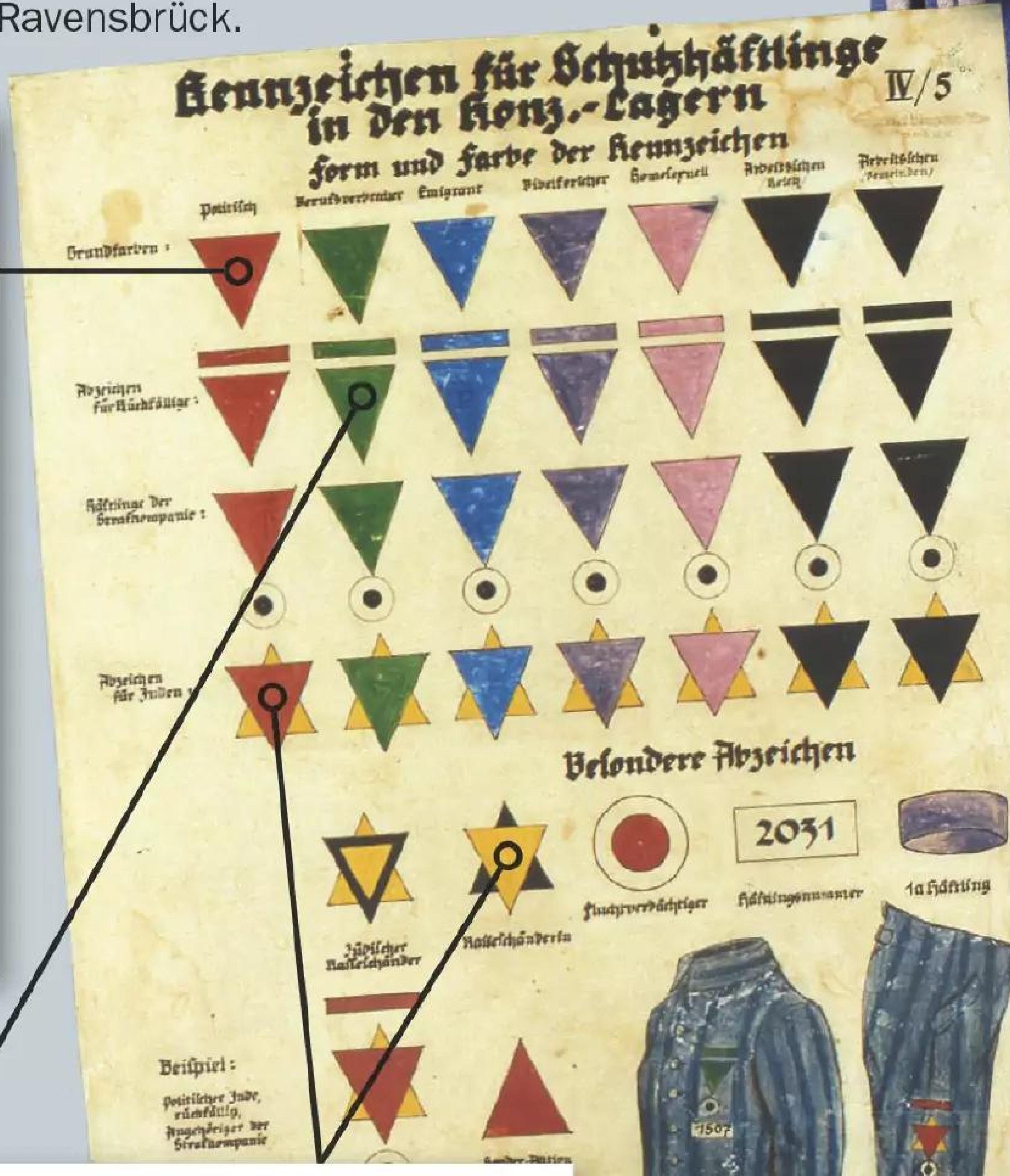
JACQUES BIEDERER

PRISONERS LABELLED WITH TRIANGLES

Special colour codes made it easy for guards to see what kind of prisoner they were facing. They also helped to create internal discord in the camp.

With thousands of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps, it was helpful for guards to be able to quickly recognise the type of prisoner they were dealing with. As early as 1933 with the Nazis' first concentration camp, Dachau, a standardised system of sew-on triangles was created, the colour of which indicated why the prisoner was in the camp. The triangle was handed out as soon as new prisoners received their uniform, so it could be sewn on their chest under their number. The system was used in all concentration camps, including Ravensbrück.

A striped smock was official prison garb, but overcrowding meant that many were given second-hand clothes.



Colours made prisoners easy to recognise

▼ **Political prisoners** The red triangle was one of the most commonly used in concentration camps. It was applied to communists, resistance fighters and others who did not blindly follow Nazi policies.

▼ **Criminals** A green triangle meant the prisoner was convicted of several offences. They often came from a prison.

▼ **Emigrants** If forced labourers from occupied countries ran away, they were sent to a camp and given a blue triangle.

▼ **Jehovah's Witnesses** A purple triangle was given to Jehovah's Witnesses, who were persecuted for their religion.

▼ **Homosexuals** The pink triangle was only used for homosexual men as the Nazis considered lesbians harmless.

▼ **Asocial** The Nazis considered the mentally ill, Gypsies and prostitutes to be asocial and a burden on society, and sent them to concentration camps. They were given black triangles.

Difficult inmates got lines and circles

▼ **Repeat offenders** Prisoners who violated the rules several times were given a line above the triangle.

▼ **Punishments** A circle under the triangle meant that the prisoner would be given hard labour and less food.

Jews had their own categories

✡ **Double triangle** Women who were both Jewish and criminal in Nazi eyes were put in Ravensbrück. The red and yellow double triangle meant she was Jewish and, for instance, communist.

✡ **Racial stigma** German women who were in a relationship with a Jew were given a special star.

The triangle system made it easy to see why a particular prisoner was in the camp and where the markings should be placed.

BUNDESARCHIV, IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUMS

like "bitch" and "dirty cow" to describe the inmates, and whenever the opportunity presented itself, they cracked the whip or slapped them. It was all part of the Nazis' carefully crafted strategy: all new prisoners had to be so scared that any thoughts of escape or rebellion were crushed.

One of the worst aspects of Ravensbrück was the German Shepherd dogs. Himmler was convinced that women were more afraid of dogs than they were of men, so many of the camp's guards were equipped with a vicious dog that the Germans allowed to snap at the prisoners. According to one guard, the dogs were trained to attack people wearing prison garb – a specific request from Himmler. He wrote to the camp commander, telling him that the dogs should be "trained to savage to death anyone except their owner". It was believed that the Nazis could save on personnel by using more dogs.

The powerful German Shepherds were difficult to control, especially for newly hired female guards at Ravensbrück. On several occasions, the animals broke free and attacked prisoners, and the guards were powerless to stop them. However, such incidents only served to increase the fear of the creatures.

Although the camp commander was a man, female guards provided daily torment for the inmates – and many enjoyed the opportunity to use sadistic methods of punishment. Particularly notorious was Dorothea Binz, who served in the camp until the end of the war. According to several witnesses, Binz ordered countless prisoners to be killed and often went on the rampage herself. Binz reportedly killed one prisoner with an axe because she had taken too long to chop firewood.

Many of Ravensbrück's guards were young women from the villages surrounding the camp. The women were usually excluded from the labour market because they lacked qualifications, but a job as a guard in the concentration camp required nothing more than rudimentary

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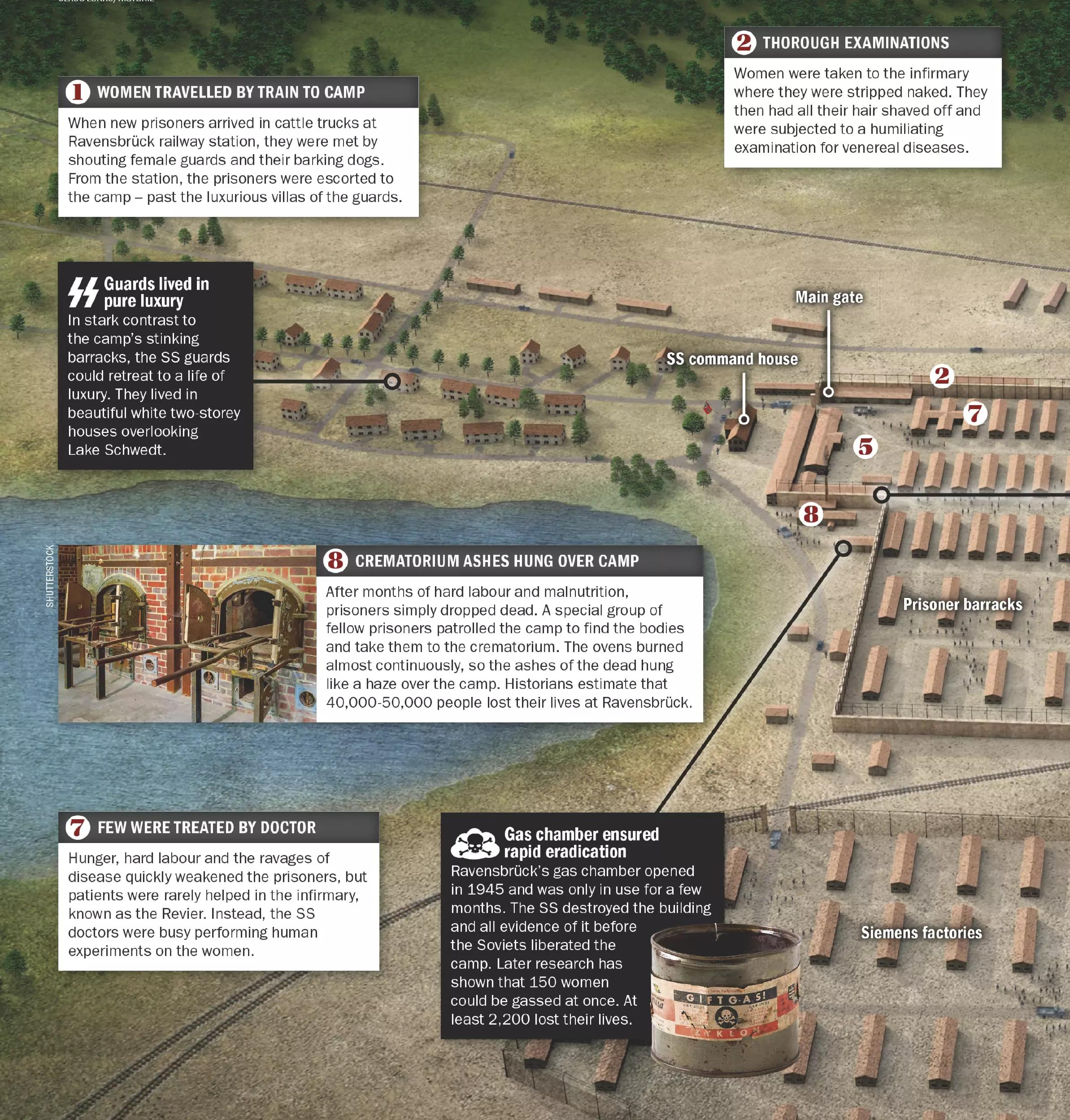
HUNGER, FEAR AND SLAVE LABOUR WOULD BREAK THE WOMEN

The Nazis did not believe that the prisoners at Ravensbrück deserved to live, but before they died, their strength had to be exploited. The Nazis underfed the prisoners, terrorised them with random punishments and made them work 11 hours a day in the camp's factories. They were, effectively, worked to death.

CLAUS LUNAU/HISTORIE



1 WOMEN TRAVELLED BY TRAIN TO CAMP

When new prisoners arrived in cattle trucks at Ravensbrück railway station, they were met by shouting female guards and their barking dogs. From the station, the prisoners were escorted to the camp – past the luxurious villas of the guards.

2 THOROUGH EXAMINATIONS

Women were taken to the infirmary where they were stripped naked. They then had all their hair shaved off and were subjected to a humiliating examination for venereal diseases.

Guards lived in pure luxury

In stark contrast to the camp's stinking barracks, the SS guards could retreat to a life of luxury. They lived in beautiful white two-storey houses overlooking Lake Schwedt.

8 CREMATORIUM ASHES HUNG OVER CAMP

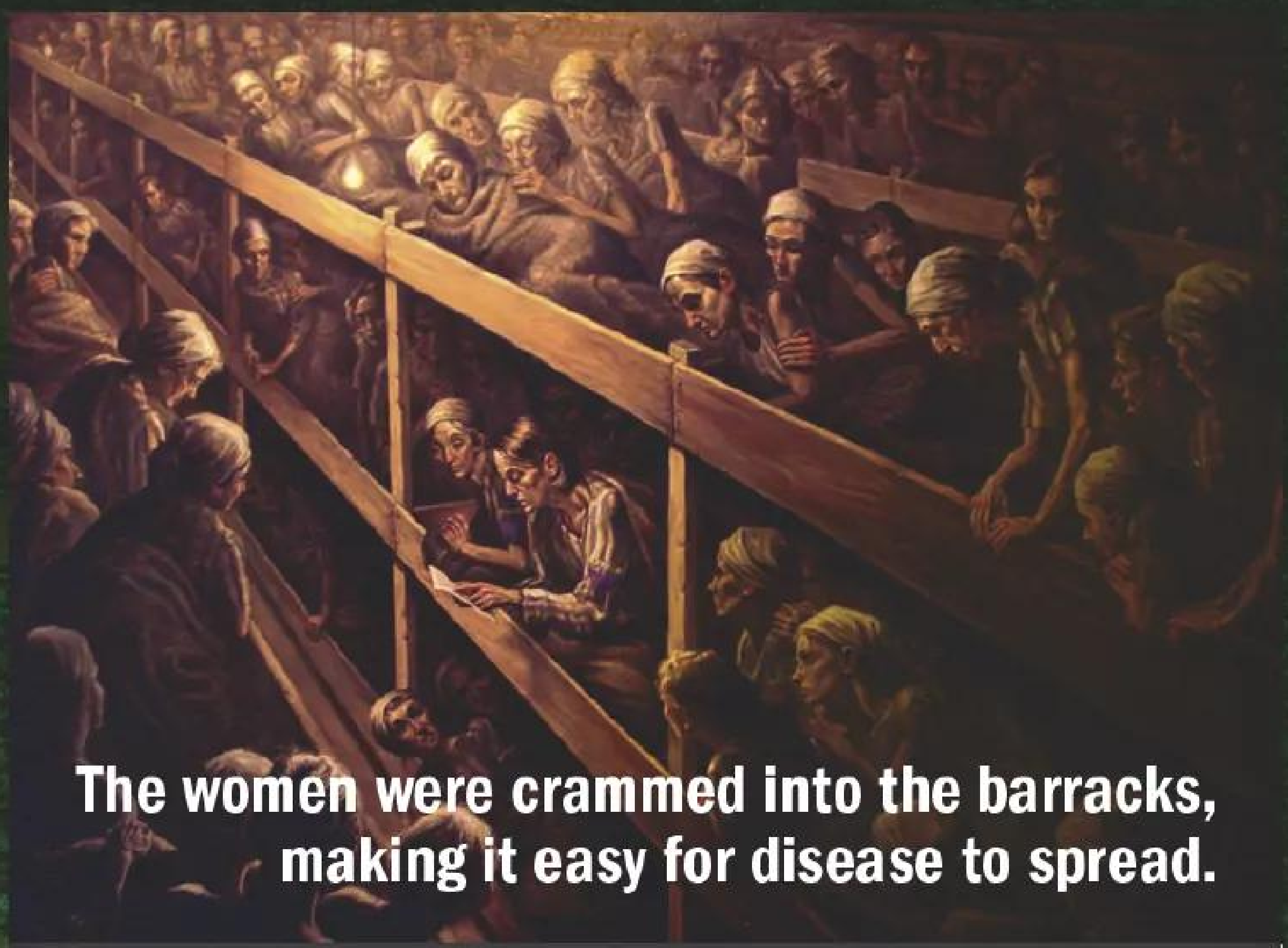
After months of hard labour and malnutrition, prisoners simply dropped dead. A special group of fellow prisoners patrolled the camp to find the bodies and take them to the crematorium. The ovens burned almost continuously, so the ashes of the dead hung like a haze over the camp. Historians estimate that 40,000-50,000 people lost their lives at Ravensbrück.

7 FEW WERE TREATED BY DOCTOR

Hunger, hard labour and the ravages of disease quickly weakened the prisoners, but patients were rarely helped in the infirmary, known as the Revier. Instead, the SS doctors were busy performing human experiments on the women.

Gas chamber ensured rapid eradication

Ravensbrück's gas chamber opened in 1945 and was only in use for a few months. The SS destroyed the building and all evidence of it before the Soviets liberated the camp. Later research has shown that 150 women could be gassed at once. At least 2,200 lost their lives.


JOSEPH BROWN

The women were crammed into the barracks, making it easy for disease to spread.

③ BARRACKS WERE OVERCROWDED

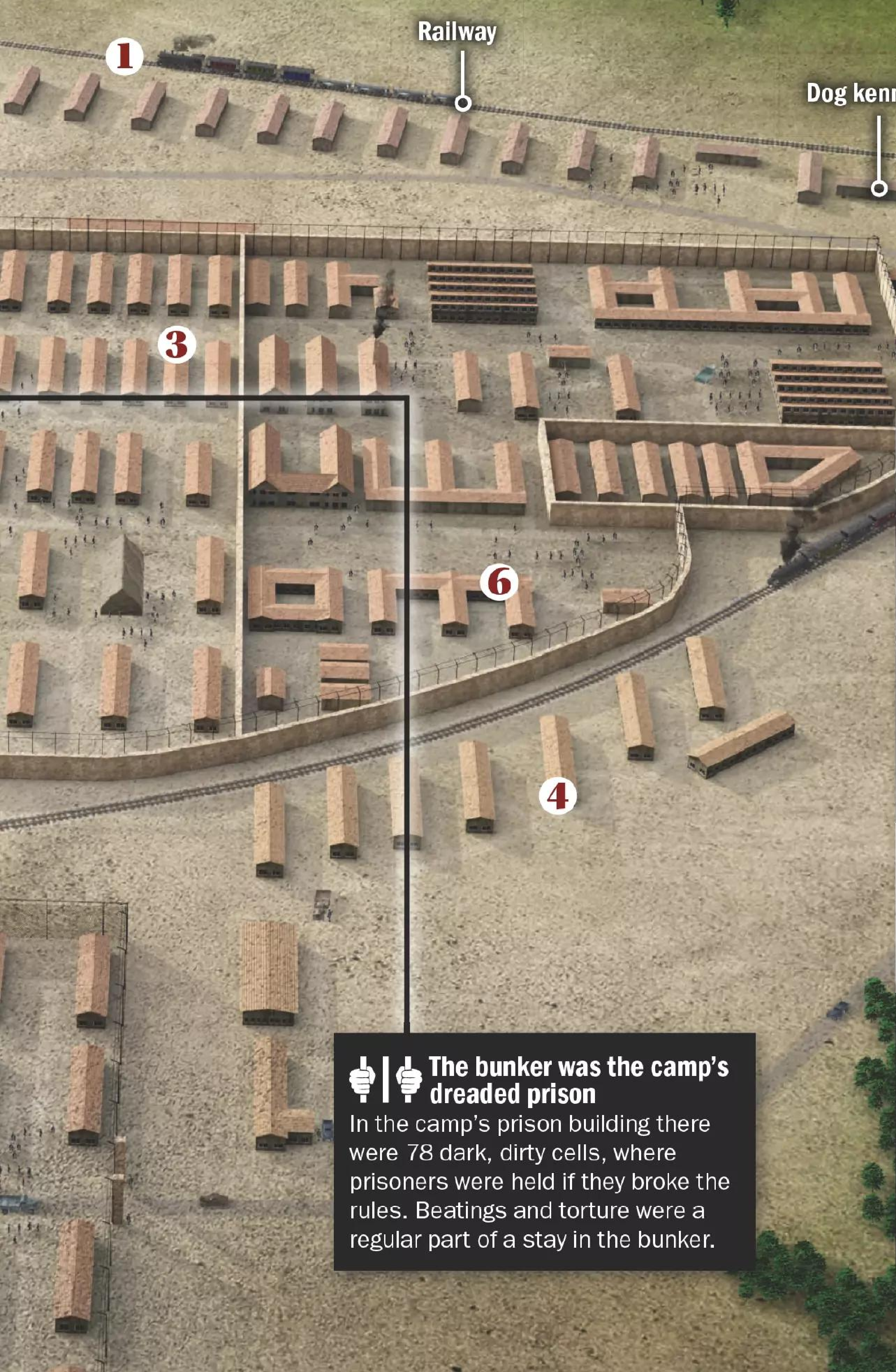
After being issued with a prison uniform, the women were distributed among the barracks, where they met their starving fellow prisoners. Overcrowding was a constant problem at Ravensbrück, which was only designed to hold 5,000 prisoners, but housed at least 50,000 in 1945. The crammed barracks were impossible to keep clean, so lice and disease were rampant.

④ PROPERTY WAS CONFISCATED AND SOLD

Upon arrival, SS guards told the women to hand over all their belongings "until there is nothing left". The belongings were taken to a series of warehouses, where valuable items such as wedding rings were sorted out and sold. Personal belongings – such as letters and pictures of children that had no value to the Germans – were burned.

The barking of vicious German Shepherds could be heard constantly in the camp.

SHUTTERSTOCK



⑤ MORNING COUNT WITH REGULAR BEATINGS

Every morning before work, the prisoners gathered in the Appellplatz to be counted. This could take hours, because even the slightest offence, such as disorder in the rows, resulted in a beating. The procedure was repeated in the evening.

Some prisoners took revenge by deliberately making a bad job of the clothes they made for German soldiers.

U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

⑥ HARD WORK KILLED THE WOMEN

After roll call, work began. Within the camp walls was the Texled textile factory, where prisoners produced clothing for the German Army. The factory was owned by the SS, which was satisfied if a Ravensbrück prisoner lasted three months before her strength was exhausted.

The bunker was the camp's dreaded prison

In the camp's prison building there were 78 dark, dirty cells, where prisoners were held if they broke the rules. Beatings and torture were a regular part of a stay in the bunker.

Prisoners kept the German war machine going

Textiles The SS owned Texled, which made uniforms and leatherwork for the German Army. A branch was located in Ravensbrück.

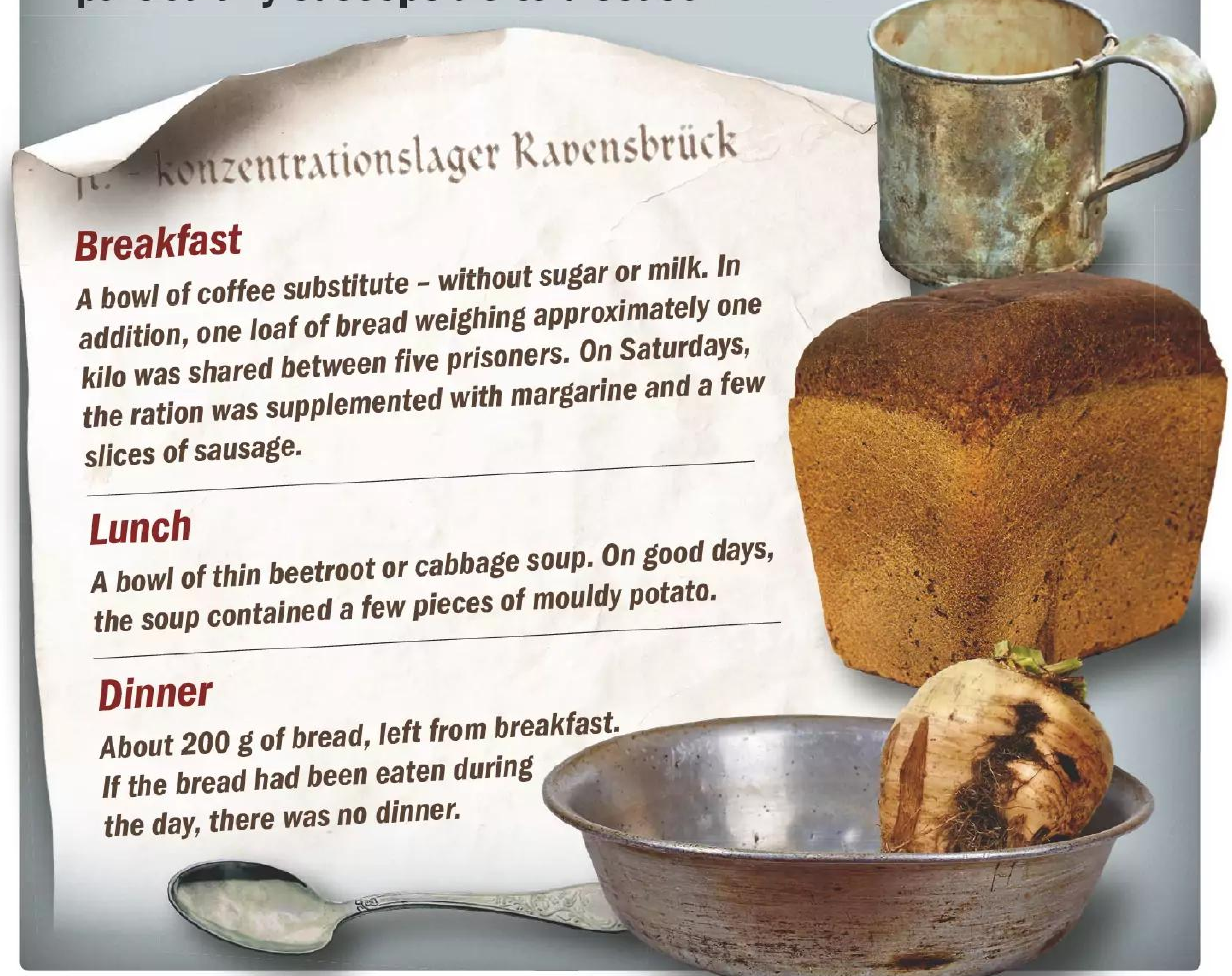
Weapons parts Siemens ran a factory in Ravensbrück. The SS hired out the prisoners – they made electrical components for V1 and V2 rockets.

Building Prisoners had to build the camp and factories. The physical labour was particularly debilitating.

SHUTTERSTOCK

WOMEN LIVED ON THE EDGE OF STARVATION

The daily food ration at Ravensbrück was so low in calories that many prisoners died of starvation. The diet, which was largely devoid of vitamins, also made prisoners particularly susceptible to disease.



Breakfast

A bowl of coffee substitute – without sugar or milk. In addition, one loaf of bread weighing approximately one kilo was shared between five prisoners. On Saturdays, the ration was supplemented with margarine and a few slices of sausage.

Lunch

A bowl of thin beetroot or cabbage soup. On good days, the soup contained a few pieces of mouldy potato.

Dinner

About 200 g of bread, left from breakfast. If the bread had been eaten during the day, there was no dinner.

training and a sadistic mentality. In no time at all, the women were in a position of power, and in their neat uniforms, they also enjoyed a certain standing in Nazi society outside the walls.

Camp grew during the war

When the Wehrmacht invaded Poland in September 1939 and World War II began, the flow of prisoners to Ravensbrück started in earnest. So, when Himmler inspected the women's camp on a cold January day in 1940 with the newly appointed camp commandant Max Koegel, it was already teeming with inmates.

Koegel proudly showed off his new punishment block, which, according to the camp commander, would help control these "hysterical hags". Peering into one of the prison's 78 dark and unhygienic cells, the Reichsführer took the opportunity to tell a religious inmate that she was now in hell: "Don't you see your God has left you? We can do with you whatever we like," sneered Himmler, who during his visit to the camp was forced to recognise a major problem: lack of room.

Over the next few years, the Nazis expanded the camp with more barracks, and factories outside the camp walls. The prisoners even had to transport and lay bricks for the construction "until hands were bloody and raw", as a Polish inmate from the camp later recounted.

Hitler's conquests brought women of 40 nationalities to the camp, and the guards expanded their vocabulary: "Slav vermin", "Jewish bitches" and "French sows" became a regular part of their lexicon.

"Franzosenchwein" was how Sunneva Sandø and her fellow French prisoners were referred to when they arrived at Ravensbrück in August 1944. Danish Sunneva had lived in Paris since 1932, and when the capital city was occupied by the Germans, she chose to join the resistance movement and risk her life by hiding Jews and British agents. She was caught by the Gestapo, who gave her a one-way ticket to Ravensbrück.

By this time, the camp was packed to bursting point. The large barracks, built for 600 people, now housed 2,500 women each. Upon arrival, Sunneva saw only exhausted prisoners, dragging themselves along like bags of broken bones due to overwork and malnutrition. Sunneva and the other 500 new arrivals were also in poor health after the long train journey from Paris – not helped by the fact that the fresh batch of prisoners had to wait two days to be assigned prison clothes and a barrack bunk.

"We stayed up all night and the next day, but the following night we lay down – because we all passed out from exhaustion," Sunneva wrote in her memoirs. The Dane's nightmare had only just begun.

Guards helped by prison elders

After two gruelling days of waiting, the camp management began registering Sunneva and the rest of the new arrivals. Each woman was given a five-digit number and a coloured patch to sew on to the old, worn-out prison uniforms. The triangular patch served as a distinguishing mark so that the guards could quickly recognise the type of prisoner standing in front of them. A yellow triangle signified a Jew, while green signified a habitual offender.

Sunneva was given a red triangle, indicating that she was a political prisoner. Wearing dirty, stinking prison clothes, she was taken to one of the camp's large barracks in the evening with 19 others.

"We were half-dead with fatigue, hunger and thirst, and huddled silently in the bunks that were graciously given to us by the so-called barrack elder and her helpers," Sunneva recalled.

Also known as *Blokovas,* the elders were inmates appointed by the guards to oversee a barrack. Blokovas were usually convicted criminals, the toughest women in the camp, who were willing to do the most awful things to avoid losing favour with the guards.

"Our barrack elder was a green triangle. She had served 11 years in

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SS Reichsfuhrer Heinrich Himmler decreed that any children accompanying the prisoners would be taken from their mothers.

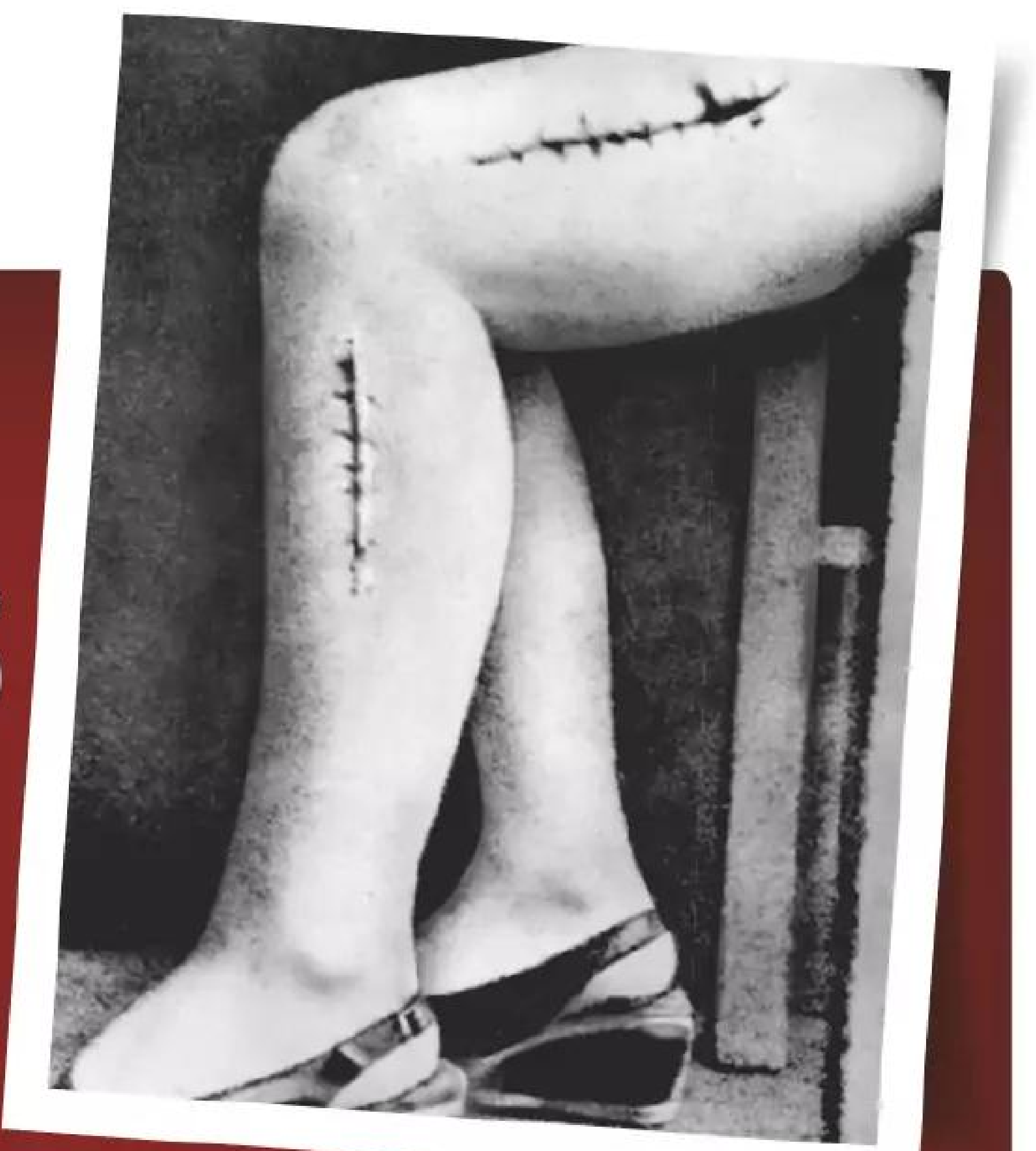
GETTY IMAGES

DOCTOR PERFORMED DEADLY EXPERIMENTS

In the early years of the war, more German soldiers died of blood poisoning than on the battlefield. To find a treatment, the Nazis set up an experimental centre in Ravensbrück.

In 1942, Himmler's personal physician, Karl Gebhardt, was allowed to conduct experiments in which the female prisoners (whom he called rabbits) had their legs cut open so the SS doctor could fill the wounds with glass and splinters, to simulate the injuries soldiers received in the field. The women were then treated with sulfonamide (an antibiotic). Some of the guinea pigs became so ill they were subsequently shot, as Gebhardt did not deign to amputate their legs. The rest were returned to the barracks.

Towards the end of the war, the camp staff tried to kill all surviving test subjects. But some managed to stay hidden so they could testify about the atrocities after the war. Karl Gebhardt was sentenced to death in 1948.



Images of the women's mutilated legs emerged during the Nuremberg trials.

BRIDGEMAN IMAGES & SHUTTERSTOCK

prison for murdering her husband, and in the years she had been in the camp, that one murder probably turned into 1,100 as she beat, abused and starved the prisoners she was responsible for," Sunneva Sandø surmised.

Blokovas carried whips and were authorised to beat inmates. These powerful women rarely hesitated to report rule-breaking by fellow prisoners to camp management. A report often resulted in the offender having their food ration reduced, their working hours increased, or being sent to the bunker – the camp's prison, where prisoners were starved and beaten so badly that they often did not survive their stay in the cells.

The use of inmates as the guards eyes and ears, and the right to punish fellow prisoners had been carefully thought out by the Nazis, who could play the prisoners off against each other: "The more there are rivalries, the more battles between the prisoners, the easier it is to control the camp," said veteran Auschwitz concentration camp commandant Rudolf Höss.

Mass punishment was also used to create discord between prisoners. The so-called standing punishment, where prisoners were forced to stand still for long periods of time without food and drink, was often assigned to an entire barrack if just one woman was caught writing a letter or stealing some extra bread. When a Gypsy escaped from the camp in February 1941, the rest of the prisoners were forced to stand on the Appellplatz until she was finally brought back through the iron gates.

Dragged past the other prisoners, leaving a trail of blood behind her, the wretched figure's clothes had been ripped to shreds by the dogs.

Many prisoners were now concerned with getting revenge for the many hours they'd spent on the Appellplatz. And the Nazis knew this, so instead of killing the Gypsy, the woman was sent back to the barracks. Shortly afterwards, she was dead – kicked and beaten to death by fellow prisoners in the camp.

> **"The more there are rivalries, the more battles between the prisoners, the easier it is to control the camp"**
>
> RUDOLF HÖSS

Sunneva became a nurse

Sunneva quickly learned that some prisoners found it difficult to show compassion when cold and hunger set in. No one in Ravensbrück dared to wash their smelly clothes, because when the rags were hung up to dry, they disappeared immediately. Stolen by a woman trying to keep warm.

"We're all friends," was often heard in the barracks, but Sunneva knew they were empty words. Most were ready to exploit any weakness in their fellow prisoners to survive themselves.

The daily hardships also meant that the women forgot all human decency. If a bunkmate died, it was common to try to hide the dead person in order to take her bread when the rations were distributed. The corpse's clothes were ripped off, even if the thief had enough clothes, because clothing could always be sold to fellow prisoners for a portion of soup or a slice of bread.

"Camp life does not bring out the best in people," Sunneva said.

Most of the women had tough physical work in the camp's sewing rooms or weapons factories, so there was competition for the less-demanding jobs that required special qualifications. Sunneva had studied medicine at the University of Copenhagen, and although she never took the final exam, she managed to get a job as a nurse in the *Revier,* the camp's sickbay.

As a nurse, Sunneva was responsible for the health of a barrack of political prisoners. However, she didn't have the means to ensure the barracks were sanitary. Lice couldn't be kept at bay in the filthy dormitory and the lack of bandages made it forbidden to dress even the worst wounds outside of prescribed days.

Every day, the Dane sent weakened prisoners to the Revier for treatment, but the German doctors often refused to accept the patients – even if Sunneva sent them three days in a row. The journey was hard on the sick women, and many ended up dying on the way to the Revier. "So they had to die to prove they were sick," Sunneva wrote dryly.

Desperate prisoners ate the dead

From late 1944, disease and halved food rations meant that 25 to 40 prisoners died every day at Ravensbrück. As a result, teams of pall-bearers constantly roamed the camp's barracks to find the dead and transport them to the crematorium. But even though the ovens ran red-hot and the ashes of burnt flesh hung like a fog over the camp, the crematorium couldn't keep up.

The bodies piled up and had to be stored in the washroom. In winter 1945, a shudder went through the camp when the prisoners realised that one of the bodies in there had open wounds and obvious teeth marks. Someone had tried to eat their fellow prisoners.

Although the death toll was rising every day, the number of prisoners continued to increase. The Red Army's rapid advance in the East meant that the Nazis had to abandon the concentration and extermination camps in Poland. Tens of thousands of emaciated prisoners were forced on winter marches to camps in Germany, and Ravensbrück was further overcrowded with women, creating chaos.

However, in February 1945, a new gas chamber was completed to alleviate overcrowding. Thousands of women, so emaciated that they could no longer work, met their end here.

Soviets liberated Ravensbrück

However, the Red Army's march on the camp prompted the Nazis to destroy the gas chamber and hide the evidence. In April, the Germans prepared to send the Ravensbrück women on a march. Sick prisoners were left behind while the Nazis escorted healthy ones westwards. However, the inevitable German defeat meant the guards quickly stopped being so vigilant, so many prisoners escaped and returned to Ravensbrück, which was liberated by the Soviets on 30th April.

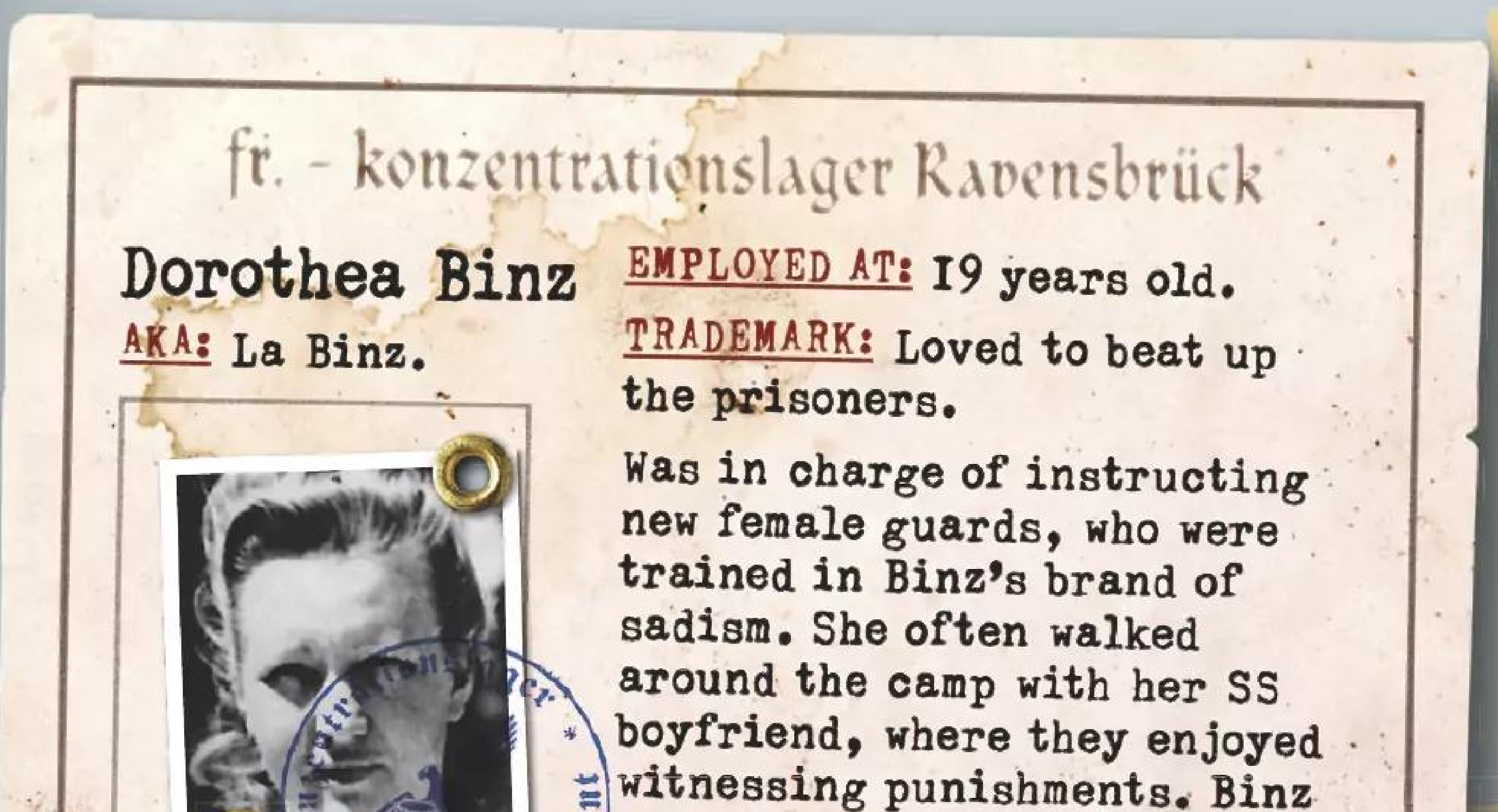
Three weeks earlier, Sunneva Sandø had been rescued. The vice president of the Swedish Red Cross, Folke Bernadotte, had been allowed to take Scandinavian concentration camp prisoners home after negotiations with Himmler. The long struggle against guards, fellow prisoners, hunger and disease was over for Sunneva.

Postscript: *After the war, Sunneva Sandø testified about Ravensbrück and helped convict the SS executioners. Later, she did charity work for Save the Children. Sunneva died in 1981.*

ALAMY, U.S. ARMY, GETTY IMAGES, LITTLE BROWN & CREATIVE COMMONS

PRISON GUARDS ENDED UP ON GALLOWS

Almost all female concentration camp guards in the Third Reich trained at Ravensbrück. Many of Germany's most sadistic women spent years in the camp before making careers in places such as Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen.



fr. - konzentrationslager Ravensbrück

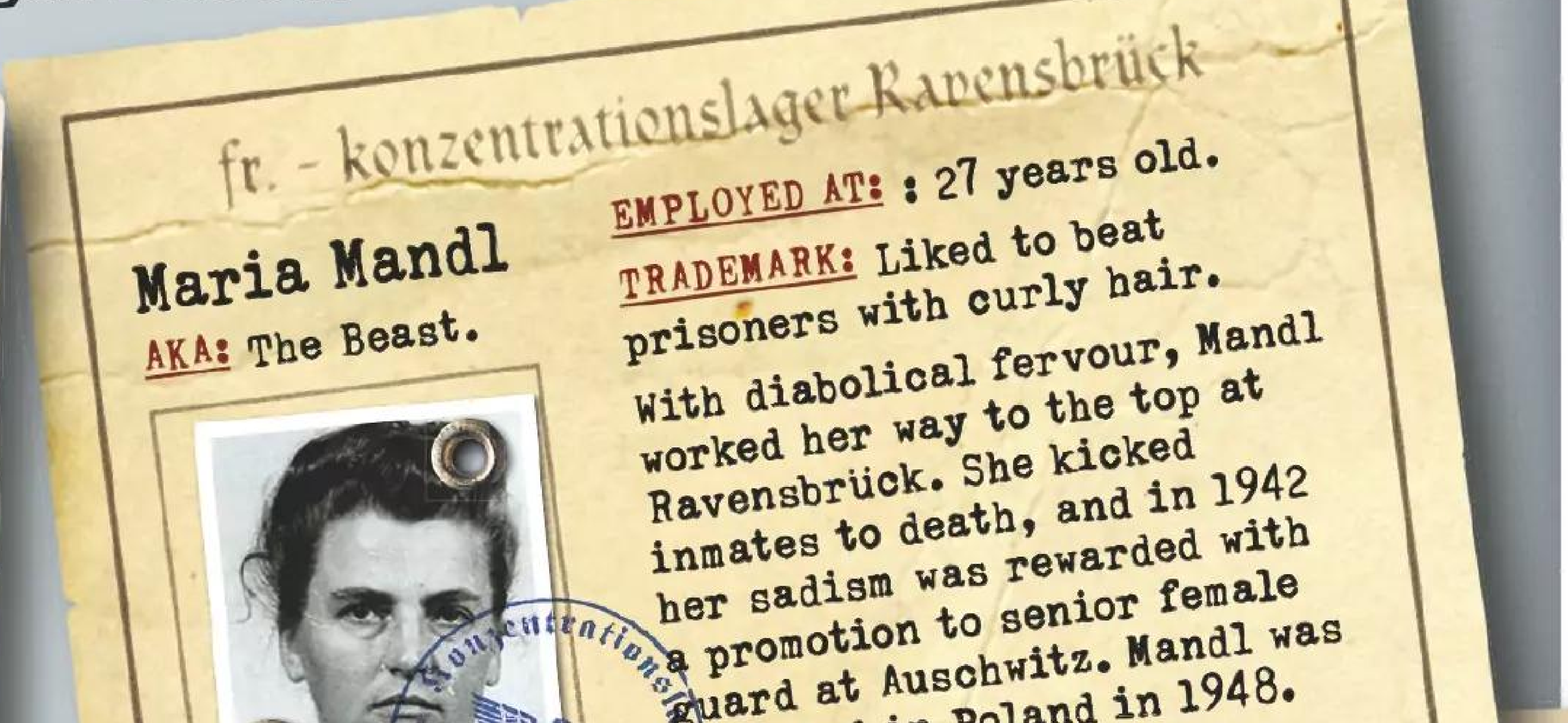
Dorothea Binz

AKA: La Binz.

EMPLOYED AT: 19 years old.

TRADEMARK: Loved to beat up the prisoners.

Was in charge of instructing new female guards, who were trained in Binz's brand of sadism. She often walked around the camp with her SS boyfriend, where they enjoyed witnessing punishments. Binz was hanged in 1947.



fr. - konzentrationslager Ravensbrück

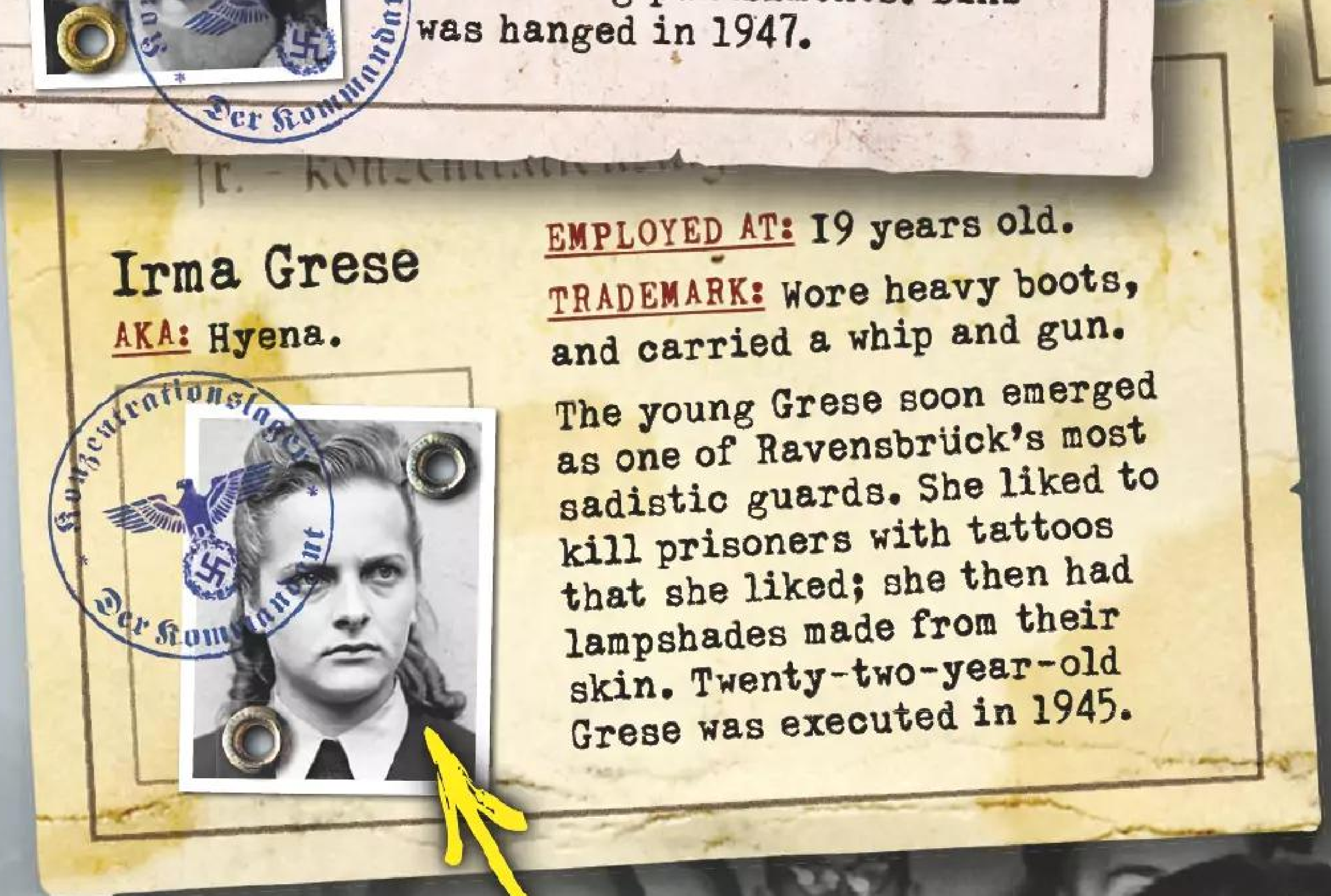
Maria Mandl

AKA: The Beast.

EMPLOYED AT: 27 years old.

TRADEMARK: Liked to beat prisoners with curly hair.

With diabolical fervour, Mandl worked her way to the top at Ravensbrück. She kicked inmates to death, and in 1942 her sadism was rewarded with a promotion to senior female guard at Auschwitz. Mandl was executed in Poland in 1948.



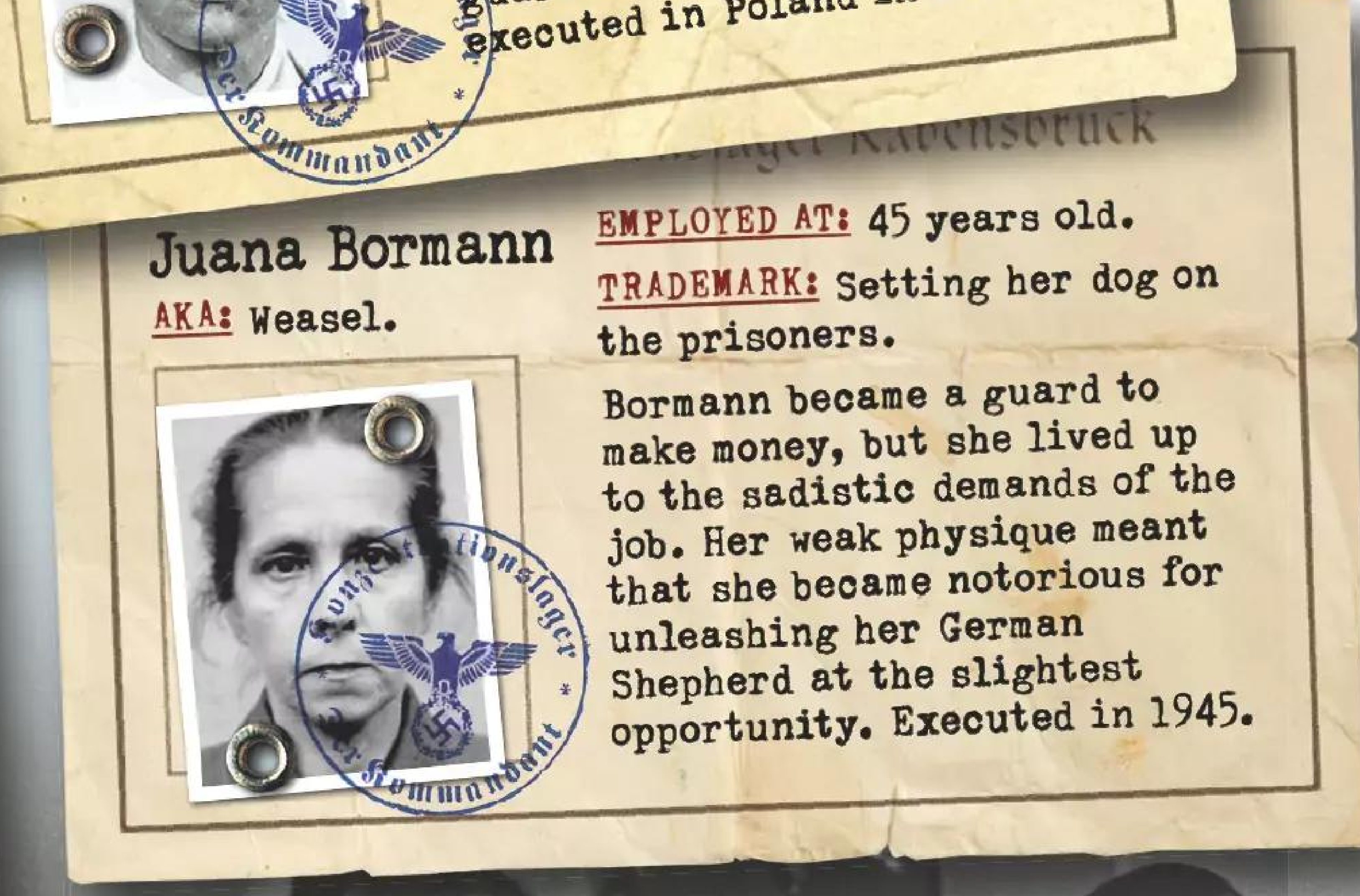
Irma Grese

AKA: Hyena.

EMPLOYED AT: 19 years old.

TRADEMARK: Wore heavy boots, and carried a whip and gun.

The young Grese soon emerged as one of Ravensbrück's most sadistic guards. She liked to kill prisoners with tattoos that she liked; she then had lampshades made from their skin. Twenty-two-year-old Grese was executed in 1945.



Juana Bormann

AKA: Weasel.

EMPLOYED AT: 45 years old.

TRADEMARK: Setting her dog on the prisoners.

Bormann became a guard to make money, but she lived up to the sadistic demands of the job. Her weak physique meant that she became notorious for unleashing her German Shepherd at the slightest opportunity. Executed in 1945.

After the war, many of the sadistic women from Ravensbrück were sentenced to death.

Artist Samuel Willenberg depicted his experiences in Treblinka in expressive figurines.

TOMER APPELBAUM/HAARETZ NEWSPAPER/ALAMY/IMAGESELECT

THE ARTIST FROM TREBLINKA

Not only did Polish Jew Samuel Willenberg fight against the Soviet invasion of Poland, but he later participated in the Warsaw Uprising against German occupation – after escaping from the infamous Nazi extermination camp Treblinka. For the rest of his life, he would bear witness to his encounter with the death factory.

By Mikkel Andersson

On 20th October 1942, Samuel Willenberg was locked in a cattle truck along with the last inhabitants of the Jewish ghetto in the town of Opatów in Nazi-occupied Poland. The train was travelling north towards an unknown destination.

Inside the train, mothers lifted their children up to the small windows so they could see the pine trees, because there had been no trees in the ghetto. There had been nothing. The children were delighted by the sight, but had no idea what was waiting for them. Of the 6,500 or so people the Germans had forced into the overcrowded train wagons, Samuel Willenberg was the only one left alive a few hours later.

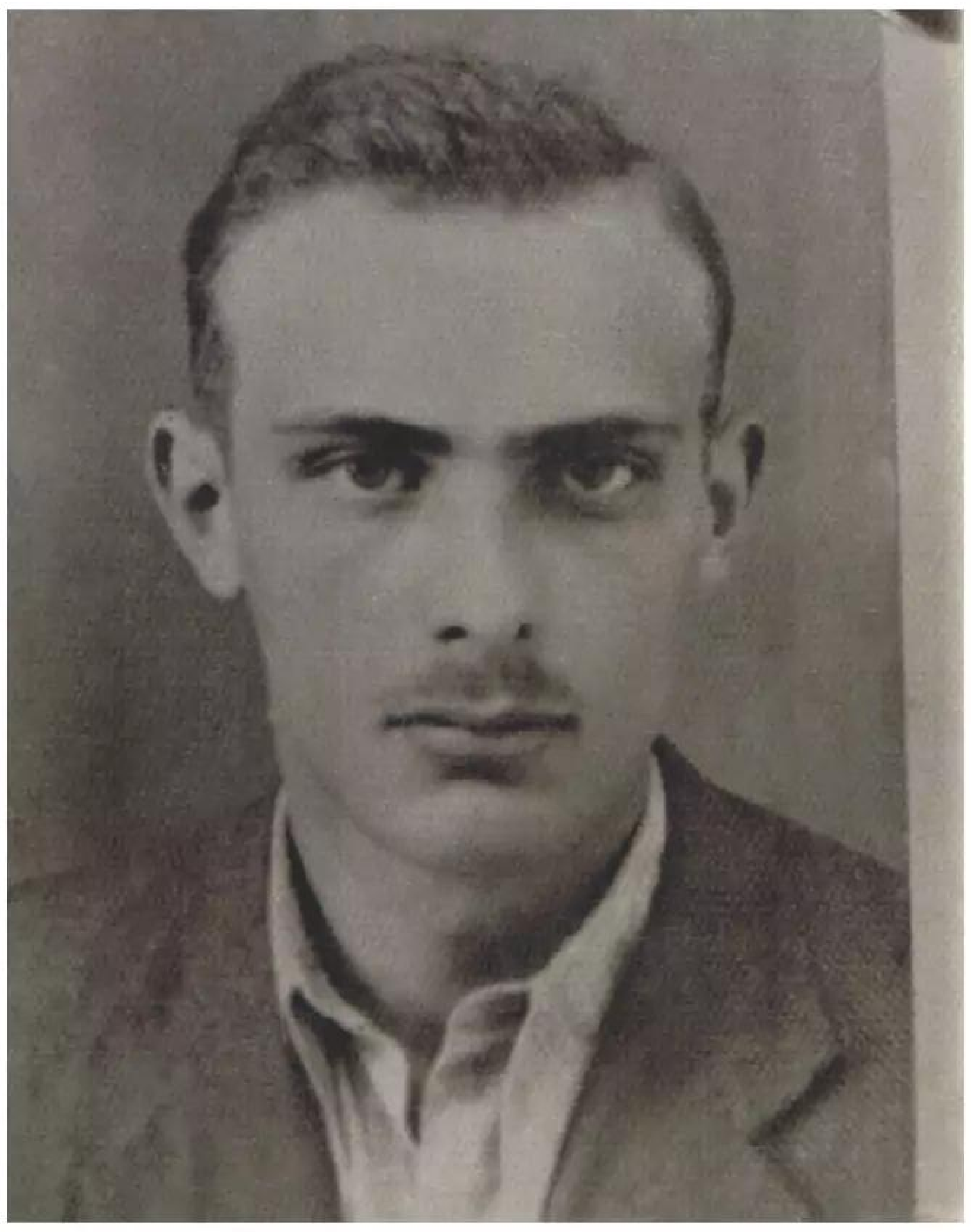
Willenberg was just 19 years old that October day, but as both a Polish Jew and a veteran, he was already hardened by both war and oppression.

When Poland was invaded by the Nazi Wehrmacht from the west in the autumn of 1939 and shortly afterwards by the Soviet Red Army from the east, the young Willenberg had enlisted in the Polish Army. There he'd fought against the Soviets and lost several comrades before he was severely

wounded during fighting near the town of Chełm. Despite his injuries, he managed to escape from the hospital where the Soviets had imprisoned Polish prisoners of war and return home to his family. Since then, the Germans had taken control of Polish territory and forced more than two million Polish Jews – the largest Jewish population in occupied Europe – into ghettos where disease and hunger reigned.

From the start of 1942, the ghettos were emptied. Residents were forced into freight wagons and transported away. The Nazis claimed they were being deported to forced labour back east, while rumours of mass murder began to circulate – rumours that the Jews in Willenberg's train had also heard, but which most dismissed as scaremongering. The Nazi occupation may have been brutal, especially to Polish Jews, but to kill them all – millions of them? It was unbelievable.

The train stopped at a small station at which the passengers could see German SS men walking around on a platform where a group of Jews also stood ready to receive the new arrivals. Behind the platform were piles of shoes and clothes. On a sign, Samuel Willenberg could read the station name: Treblinka. The train doors opened and, amid much confusion and constant German shouts to hurry up, the passengers were herded into a large square. The newcomers were then told to completely undress.


WLRN-TV/REUTERS/RITZAU SCANPIX

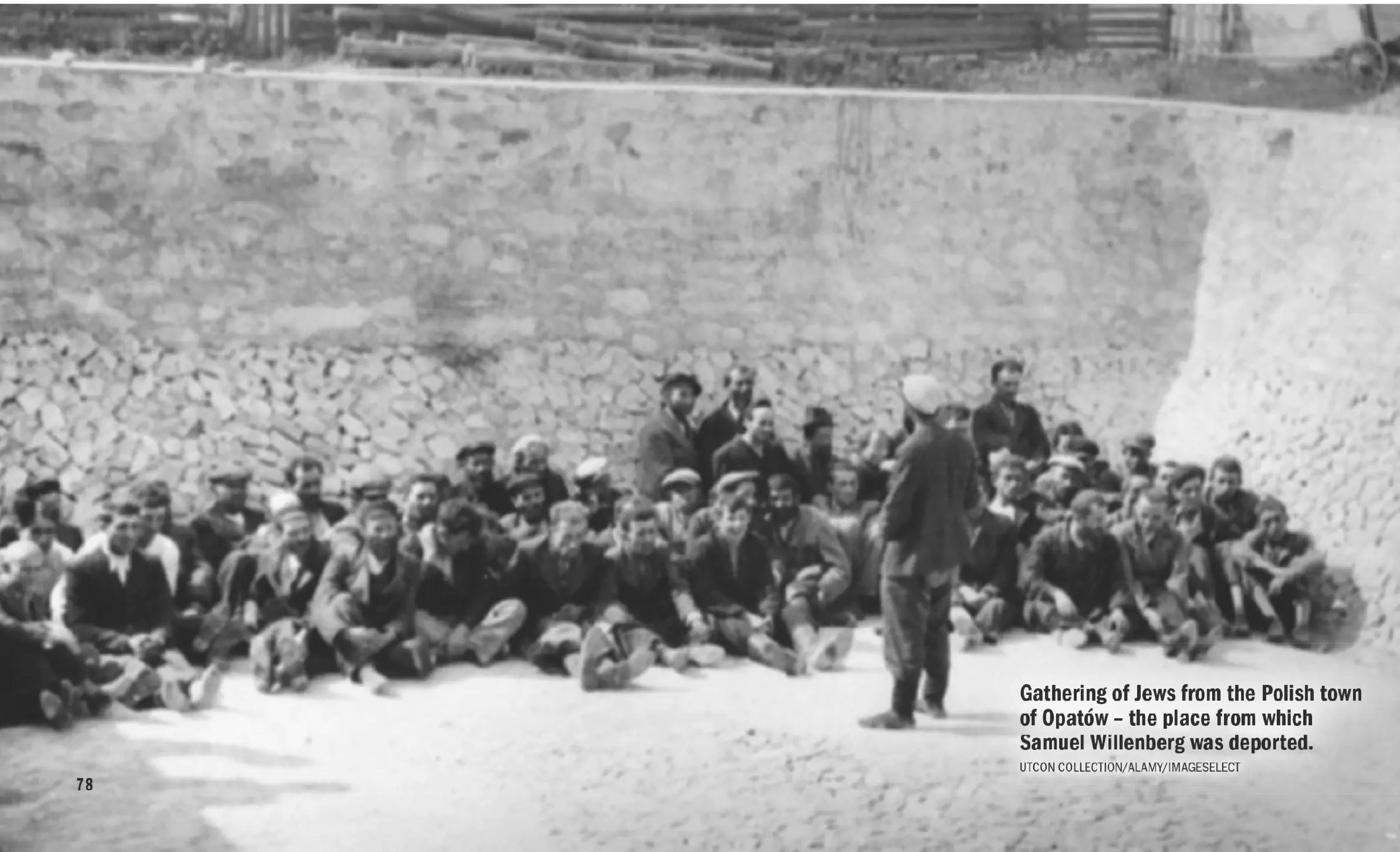
Samuel Willenberg in 1941 – the year before he was sent to Treblinka.

Among the welcoming committee, Willenberg recognised one of the men from his hometown, Czestochowa, in southern Poland – childhood friend Alfred Boehm. Boehm also spotted Willenberg and told him to pose as a bricklayer, which a confused Willenberg did when an SS man approached him shortly after. With a kick, the SS man sent Willenberg to a room, from where he could watch through a knothole as all those with whom he'd arrived at Treblinka were sent naked to an undisclosed destination.

Samuel Willenberg described in his memoirs how he later sought out Boehm for an explanation of what was happening in the camp: "Alfred gave me a pitying look. Spreading his arms wide as if presenting me his empire, he said, 'Samek, you're in the Treblinka death camp ... This is an efficient, well-oiled death factory. All the men, after they undress, are made to run to the neighbouring camp, past the sandbank. That's the death camp. There they are stuffed into gas chambers. After they've been gassed, the bodies are thrown into deep pits, and, when one pit is filled, they dig new ones. They're buried town after town, together.'"

Unable to escape death factory

Before ending up in Treblinka, Willenberg had been in an unusual situation. Although his originally Christian mother had converted to Judaism when she married, she was



Gathering of Jews from the Polish town of Opatów – the place from which Samuel Willenberg was deported.

UTCON COLLECTION/ALAMY/IMAGESELECT

considered a non-Jew by the Nazis. They believed that Judaism was in the blood, so she was able live in relative safety. But her Jewish husband and three children were in constant danger. Samuel's father, Perec Willenberg, was a well-known artist and teacher in his home town of Czestochowa, who could not avoid being recognised and deported, so he saw no option than to go into hiding as a non-Jewish Pole in Warsaw, where he lost contact with his family.

Samuel Willenberg and his two sisters, Itta and Tamara, aged 23 and four, continued to live with their mother, and all three offspring were provided with false non-Jewish papers to ensure they were not deported. Yet disaster struck when Willenberg and his mother returned to their small room in a guest house in the Christian part of the city after running an errand:

> **"Samek, you're in the Treblinka death camp ... All the men ... are stuffed into gas chambers"**
>
> ALFRED BOEHM, POLISH JEW

"We reached the flat and knocked on the door impatiently. The landlady pulled the door open, blocked our access and announced that the girls were not at home. Mother asked if they had gone for a walk. The answer: they had been arrested by the police for being Jewish. The tenant in the second room had been arrested, too. With this, she slammed the door in our faces. There we stood, stunned and helpless, in the dark, putrid corridor. Suddenly it was clear that I had lost my two sisters, and Mother her two daughters."

His mother told Samuel that he should try to follow his father's example and pretend to be a gentile in another city. Meanwhile, she would do everything she could to get the two girls out of the prison in Czestochowa, where they were incarcerated with other Jews awaiting deportation to an uncertain fate. Willenberg then left his home town and went to Opatów, a few hundred kilometres away. But in vain. Together with the rest of the town's Jews, he was soon sent to the Treblinka death camp.

Living in the gas chambers' shadow

Treblinka was unlike most other Nazi camps. The few Jewish prisoners who, like Willenberg, were not killed on arrival at the camp were not forced into the usual striped camp uniforms. Instead, they were free to choose from well-fitting, expensive clothes taken from those who had been murdered.

And as long as people were being brought to the camp, the prisoners did not go hungry. They had access to a large selection of food brought in by the murdered, as Willenberg realised the very first night:

"I raised to my lips a spoonful of egg barley, which had undoubtedly been prepared by a worried Jewish housewife, perhaps with her last few coins. This food was high in calories, full of nourishment. It had been meant to help someone, now dead, hold out a little longer at the end of his journey into the unknown."

But while material conditions were better than in many other camps, the SS staff were no less sadistic towards the prisoners.

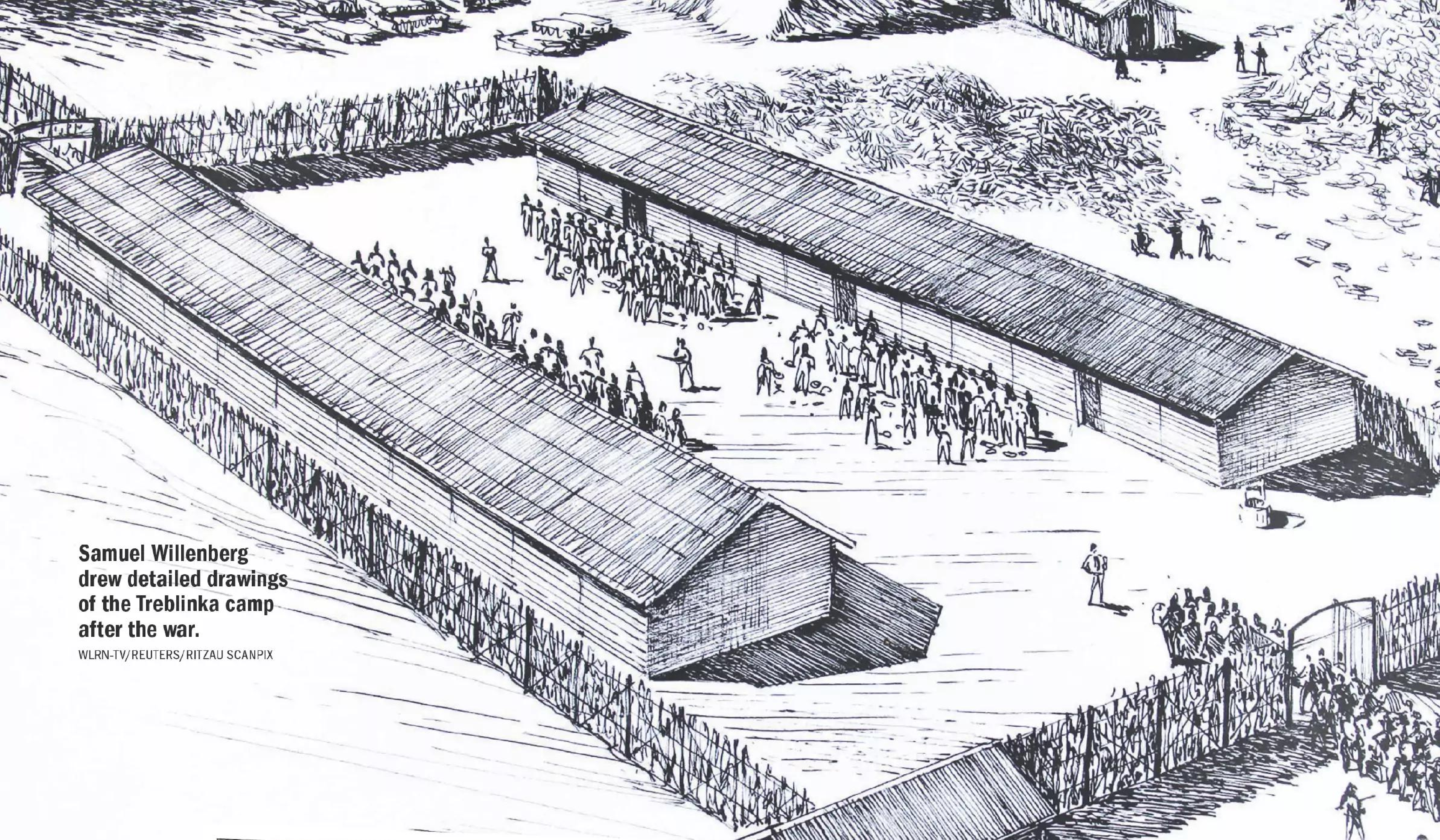
The working Jews of Treblinka were at risk of being brutally assaulted by the guards at any moment and for no particular reason, and the camp's deputy leader, Kurt Franz, posed a constant threat. Franz had originally trained as a cook and had worked as such at several of the so-called Aktion T4 centres for killing Germans with disabilities. But in Treblinka, he showed a great talent for genocide and quickly rose to become the camp's second-in-command.

Despite a supposedly angelic face that earned Franz the nickname Lalka, Polish for doll, among the prisoners, he was exceptionally brutal.

Willenberg described how, after beating a man to death for allegedly stealing clothes, Kurt Franz amused himself by attacking prisoners visiting the camp's open toilet pits. "He turned toward the latrine with the prancing steps of a pimp – or an inhuman monster – and, from a certain distance, began shooting between the legs of the »

Willenberg's sculpture of the Jewish woman Ruth Dorfmann, whose name he promised to remember.

TOMER APPELBAUM/HAARETZ NEWSPAPER



Samuel Willenberg drew detailed drawings of the Treblinka camp after the war.

WLRN-TV/REUTERS/RITZAU SCANPIX

Bottom: A photo taken by Treblinka's second-in-command, Kurt Franz, who saved several photos from the camp in an album titled 'Beautiful Years'. In the photo, Treblinka's gas chambers can be seen in the background on the left. Top: One of the mass graves from the extermination camp.

ARCHIVE PL/ALAMY/IMAGESELECT/ARC 2006

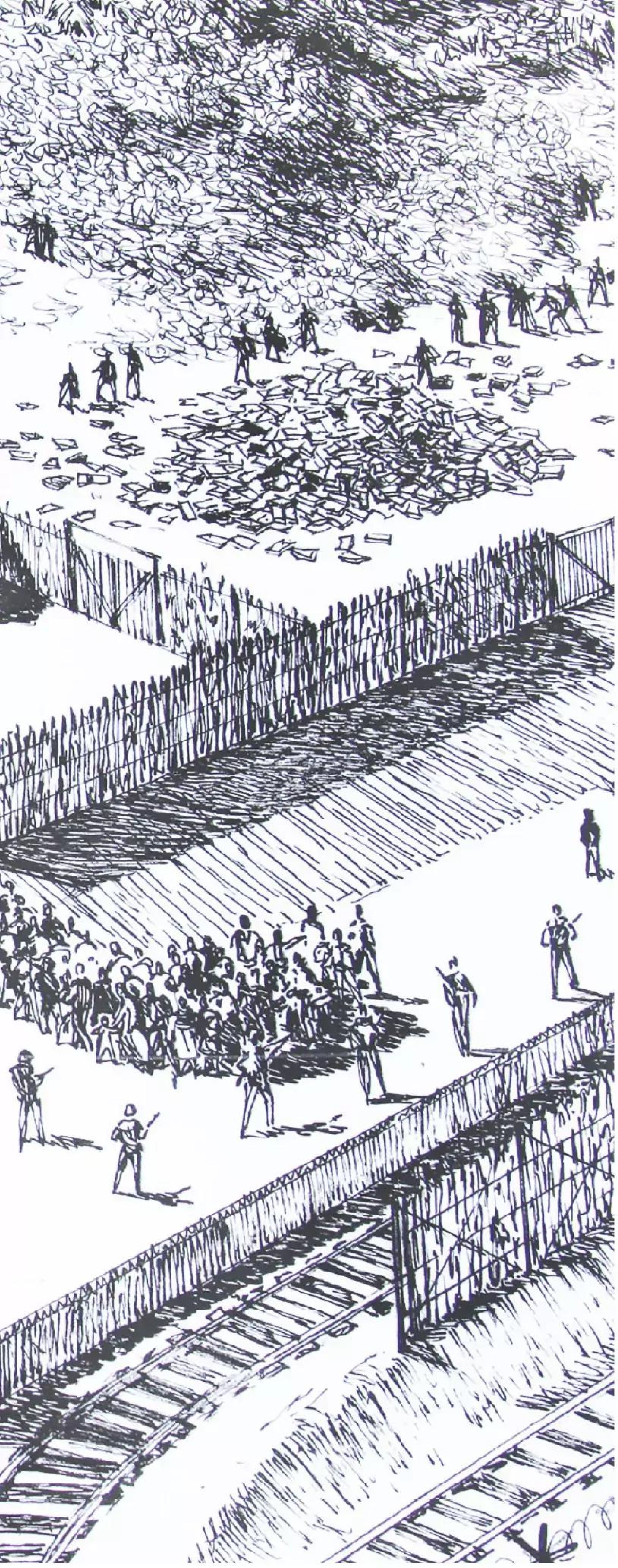
men seated there. After each volley, he raced toward the outhouse to check the results; then, with a courteous smile, he ordered his victim to get to work. When the miserable quarry turned around to do Lalka's bidding, the officer would shoot him in the back or the head, leaving the corpse where it fell."

Perhaps surprisingly, music also played a role in Treblinka. The SS men were particularly fond of forcing the working Jews to sing the sentimental Polish folk song 'Highlander, Aren't You Sad?', and in the autumn of 1942, Artur Gold, one of the most popular composers and musicians of the interwar period, arrived in Treblinka. He was immediately recognised and put in charge of a three-man orchestra. They now entertained the SS staff in their camp club, known as the Casino, where the Germans relaxed in the evenings. But the prisoners were also forced to be an audience during evening roll call, when they were counted:

"As we stood at roll call, Gold entranced us with the old melodies he produced with his violin – amidst the sweet, nauseating stench of decomposing bodies which clung to us ... After one of these concerts the Germans reached a conclusion: the maestros did not look good. Their clothes were too big, held up by all kinds of belts, and their boots were high and heavy. They ordered our tailors to sew jackets of shiny, loud blue cloth, and to attach giant bow-ties to the collars. Dressed not as prisoners any longer but as clowns, they entertained us after roll call day in, day out. However spent we might be after a 12-hour working day, we had to stand in rank and take in a concert."

Found sisters' clothes

One frosty morning, Samuel Willenberg realised what had happened to his two sisters. He had been assigned to sort



through the clothes of a fresh transport of prisoners who had undressed and been sent to the gas chamber. "I noticed a familiar colour amid the pieces of clothing strewn on the ground. Bending again, I lifted a small brown coat which had belonged to my little sister Tamara. A skirt worn by my older sister Itta clung to it – as if in a sister's embrace. I was holding a coat and a skirt which had belonged to my sisters. Mother had lengthened the sleeves of the coat with bits of green cloth. Mother's efforts to free my sisters had been futile, I understood," Willenberg said.

The victims, upon learning what fate awaited them on arrival at Treblinka, sometimes rebelled. One night, the Jews locked in their barracks heard gunshots and loud shouts from the SS men. They received an explanation the following morning. "At daybreak we learned that a transport from Grodno had arrived during the night. The Jews had climbed out of the wagons and discovered what awaited them here. When they were ordered to strip, they attacked the SS men with knives and bottles. There were 2,000 people in the transport, including women and many children. In the end, of course, they were gunned down. The corpses were stretched out in the yard; three SS casualties were taken to hospital. When we came out of the hut in the morning, we saw bodies strewn between the rags and bundles, with a thin layer of wonderful, pristine white snow covering everything."

The Jews working at Treblinka also developed a plan to deal with their executioners and escape the camp. An opportunity presented itself when the camp's Jewish locksmiths were told to make keys for a newly built armoury. They did so – and also made one for the camp's secret resistance movement, which had been planning an uprising for some time. The prisoners secured a large number of rifles and on 2nd August 1943 at 15.45, the Jews attacked the camp guards and set fire to several buildings and a petrol depot.

Most of the rioters were brutally mowed down while trying to escape, but Willenberg and several hundred other prisoners managed to fight their way out of the camp.

Along the way, Willenberg found Alfred Boehm, who had been his closest friend in the camp for the 10 months he had been there. Boehm had been assigned by the SS to collect rubbish and bottles from the camp in a child's pram and therefore had the right to move around unhindered, which had been crucial in coordinating the uprising.

"I saw a little overturned pram. Recognizing it as Alfred's, I looked for my friend. There he was, prostrate beside the fence as if about to fire. Running over to him, I found his head slumped to the left and pouring blood."

Shortly afterwards, another of Willenberg's friends, a Jewish convert to Christianity known as the minister, was also hit. "While firing, the minister crumpled to the ground beside the logs, struck in the leg. I leapt over him, and our eyes met. He showed no fear, only determination as he delivered his last request. His pale lips trembling, he begged, 'Katzap [Willenberg's nickname in Treblinka], finish me off – in the name of He in whom you do not believe.' I gestured at the death camp. 'Look over there,' I said. 'There are your wife and children.' ... I pushed my rifle into his head and squeezed the trigger."

Getting out of hell alive

After the uprising, Willenberg managed to reach Warsaw and locate his father, who had been able to keep his Jewish background hidden by posing as a mute artist painting pious pictures of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Willenberg's mother, who worked at an arms factory in another city, arrived soon after. Both parents had long since written off all three of their children as dead in Treblinka – a camp from which no one usually returned.

"There was Mother. She looked at me in disbelief and, as if waking from a dream, rubbed her eyes and whispered, 'Is it you, Samek?' I felt she was about to collapse. I supported her and helped her into the room. She clutched me, and we cried in each other's arms ... Mother then asked the question I dreaded: 'Did you see your sisters there?' Having deceived Father, I now deceived Mother the same way: 'I knew nothing about my sisters,' I said."

Kurt Franz, second-in-command at Treblinka, often shot prisoners for fun.

INSTYTUT WYDAWNICZY PAX

Samuel Willenberg never told his parents that he had come across

Continued on page 85

From ‘euthanasia’ to genocide:
THE KILLERS OF OPERATION REINHARD

Killing Germans with disabilities paved the way for three of the Nazis’ most efficient death factories.

The Nazi genocide of Jews in gas chambers is almost synonymous with the familiar black and white images of the vast Auschwitz complex with its endless rows of wooden barracks and starving prisoners. But the majority of Nazi gassings took place in small camps the size of a couple of football pitches. Treblinka was one of them.

While Auschwitz was both an extermination and concentration camp, housing more than a hundred thousand prisoners used for forced labour, Treblinka – and its sister camps Bełzec and Sobibór – functioned solely as extermination camps with one purpose: industrial-scale mass murder.

In the three camps, over 99.9 per cent of the deportees were murdered within hours of arrival. Only a few hundred Jews, who were forced to assist in the killing process, maintain the camp and serve SS personnel, initially escaped the gas chambers. Artist Samuel Willenberg was one of them.

The three death camps Treblinka, Bełzec and Sobibór were collectively known as the Operation Reinhard camps – named after top Nazi Reinhard Heydrich, who was one of the main architects of the plans to exterminate European Jewry. Heydrich was killed by Czech resistance fighters in Prague in the summer of 1942 and his colleagues chose to honour him by naming the genocide programme after him.

Many of the Operation Reinhard camps’ staff came from the so-called Aktion T4 programme, which Hitler set up in September 1939 to kill Germans with disabilities.

In six killing centres in Germany and Austria, which had previously served or still served as hospitals and nursing homes, at least 100,000 citizens with both mild and severe physical and mental disabilities were killed with machine guns by a special unit with the innocuous cover name of the Charitable Foundation for Cure and Institutional Care.

The unit, whose sole task was murder, was composed of craftsmen, unskilled workers, policemen and even former disabled patients whose only common tie was that they were members of the Nazi party or one of its many sub-organisations, and had more or less by chance come into contact with and were employed by the programme.

There is no indication that the participants of Aktion T4 were selected to engage in the mass murder of innocent and defenceless victims because they had any particularly sadistic or murderous characteristics. Nevertheless, the men of T4 ended up helping to kill both tens of thousands of disabled German people and, later, hundreds of thousands of Jews.

INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL REMEMBRANCE

Polish Jews from the Siedlce ghetto were deported to Treblinka in 1942.

The purpose of killing the disabled was to prevent ‘defective’ genes from spreading in the German population and save money on caring for people whom the Nazis felt did not deserve to live. However, it proved difficult to keep the killings secret and the programme was criticised by both the relatives of those killed and the Catholic Bishop Graf von Galen. Aktion T4’s gassings were therefore stopped in August 1941, but the killing of the disabled, including by lethal injection or starvation, secretly continued until the end of World War II.

The staff who had been responsible for the gassings until the summer of 1941 were not left without work. They had expertise in mass murder that would prove useful in other contexts.

In December 1941, former police detective and SS officer Christian Wirth arrived in the small village of Bełzec in the easternmost part of occupied

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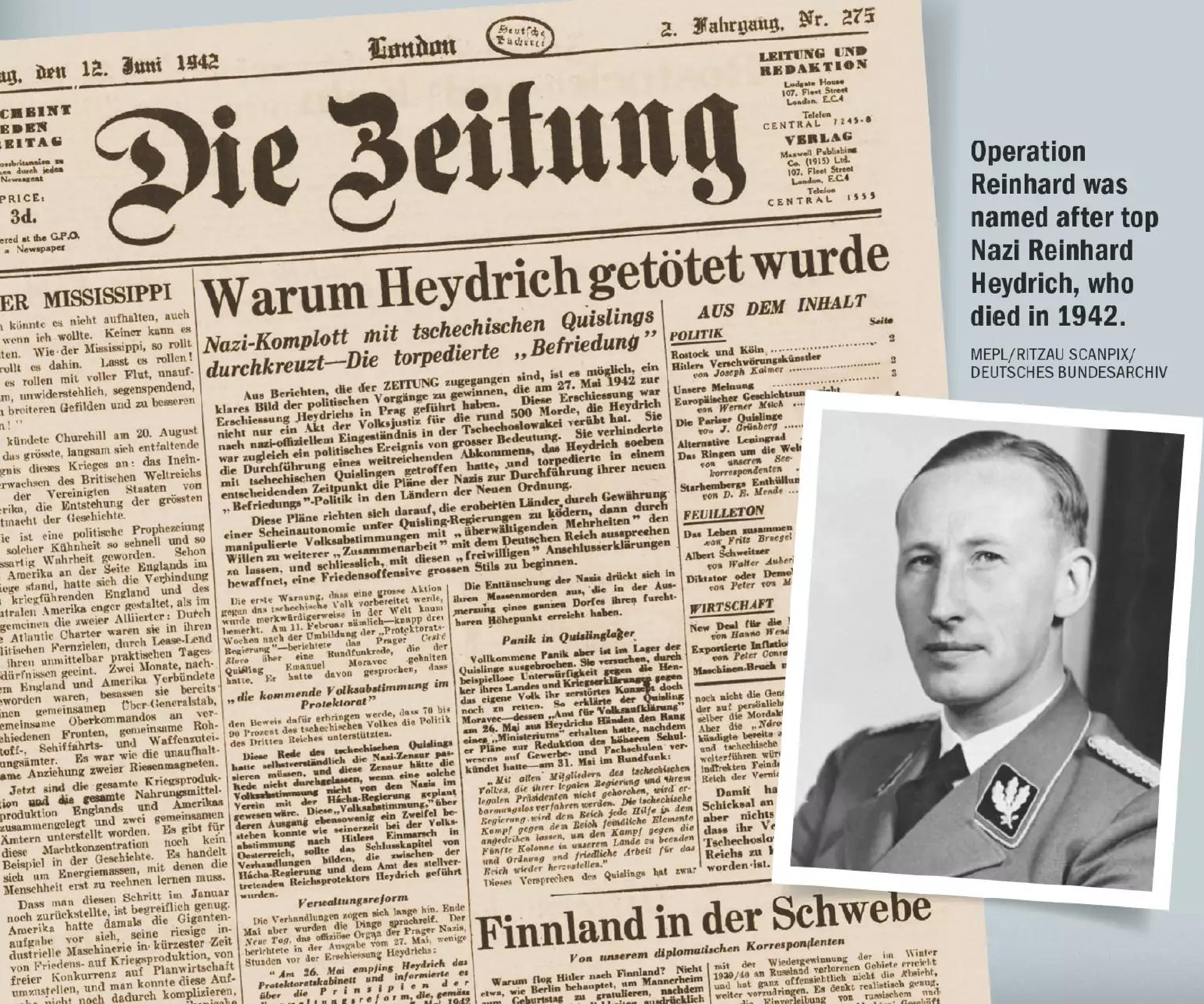

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ER MISSISSIPPI

n könnte es nicht aufhalten, auch
wenn ich wollte. Keiner kann es
ten. Wie der Mississippi, so rollt
rollt es dahin. Lasst es rollen!
es rollen mit voller Flut, unauf-
m, unwiderstehlich, segenspendend,
n breiteren Gefilden und zu besseren
n!"
kündete Churchill am 20. August
das grösste, langsam sich entfaltende
gnis dieses Krieges an: das Inein-
rwachsen des Britischen Weltreichs
der Vereinigten Staaten von
rika, die Entstehung der grössten
tmacht der Geschichte.
ie ist eine politische Prophezeiung
solcher Kühnheit so schnell und so
ssartig Wahrheit geworden. Schon
Amerika an der Seite Englands im
iege stand, hatte sich die Verbindung
kriegführenden England und des
tralen Amerika enger gestaltet, als im
gemeinen die zweier Alliierter: Durch
Atlantic Charter waren sie in ihren
litischen Fernzielen, durch Lease-Lend
ihren unmittelbar praktischen Tages-
dürfnissen geeint. Zwei Monate, nach-
m England und Amerika Verbündete
worden waren, besassen sie bereits
nen gemeinsamen Über-Generalstab,
emeinsame Oberkommandos an ver-
chiedenen Fronten, gemeinsame Roh-
toff-, Schiffahrts- und Waffenzutei-
ungsämter. Es war wie die unaufhalt-
ame Anziehung zweier Riesenmagneten.
Jetzt sind die gesamte Kriegsproduk-
tion und die gesamte Nahrungsmittel-
produktion Englands und Amerikas
zusammengelegt und zwei gemeinsamen
Ämtern unterstellt worden. Es gibt für
diese Machtkonzentration noch kein
Beispiel in der Geschichte. Es handelt
sich um Energiemassen, mit denen die
Menschheit erst zu rechnen lernen muss.
Dass man diesen Schritt im Januar
noch zurückstellte, ist begreiflich genug.
Amerika hatte damals die Giganten-
aufgabe vor sich, seine riesige in-
dustrielle Maschinerie in kürzester Zeit
von Friedens- auf Kriegsproduktion, von
freier Konkurrenz auf Planwirtschaft
umzustellen, und man konnte diese Auf-
e nicht noch dadurch komplizieren,

Warum Heydrich getötet wurde

Nazi-Komplott mit tschechischen Quislings durchkreuzt—Die torpedierte „Befriedung"

Aus Berichten, die der ZEITUNG zugegangen sind, ist es möglich, ein klares Bild der politischen Vorgänge zu gewinnen, die am 27. Mai 1942 zur Erschiessung Heydrichs in Prag geführt haben. Diese Erschiessung war nicht nur ein Akt der Volksjustiz für die rund 500 Morde, die Heydrich nach nazi-offiziellem Eingeständnis in der Tschechoslowakei verübt hat. Sie war zugleich ein politisches Ereignis von grosser Bedeutung. Sie verhinderte die Durchführung eines weitreichenden Abkommens, das Heydrich soeben mit tschechischen Quislingen getroffen hatte, und torpedierte in einem entscheidenden Zeitpunkt die Pläne der Nazis zur Durchführung ihrer neuen „Befriedungs"-Politik in den Ländern der Neuen Ordnung.

Diese Pläne richten sich darauf, die eroberten Länder durch Gewährung einer Scheinautonomie unter Quisling-Regierungen zu ködern, dann durch manipulierte Volksabstimmungen mit „überwältigenden Mehrheiten" den Willen zu weiterer „Zusammenarbeit" mit dem Deutschen Reich aussprechen zu lassen, und schliesslich, mit diesen „freiwilligen" Anschlusserklärungen bewaffnet, eine Friedensoffensive grossen Stils zu beginnen.

Die erste Warnung, dass eine grosse Aktion gegen das tschechische Volk vorbereitet werde, wurde merkwürdigerweise in der Welt kaum bemerkt. Am 11. Februar nämlich—knapp drei Wochen nach der Umbildung der „Protektorats-Regierung"—berichtete das Prager *České Slovo* über eine Rundfunkrede, die der Quisling Emanuel Moravec gehalten hatte. Er hatte davon gesprochen, dass

„die kommende Volksabstimmung im Protektorat"

den Beweis dafür erbringen werde, dass 70 bis 90 Prozent des tschechischen Volkes die Politik des Dritten Reiches unterstützten.

Diese Rede des tschechischen Quislings hatte selbstverständlich die Nazi-Zensur passieren müssen, und diese Zensur hätte die Rede nicht durchgelassen, wenn eine solche Volksabstimmung nicht von den Nazis im Verein mit der Hácha-Regierung geplant gewesen wäre. Diese „Volksabstimmung," über deren Ausgang ebensowenig ein Zweifel bestehen konnte wie seinerzeit bei der Volksabstimmung nach Hitlers Einmarsch in Oesterreich, sollte das Schlusskapitel von Verhandlungen bilden, die zwischen der Hácha-Regierung und dem Amt des stellvertretenden Reichsprotektors Heydrich geführt wurden.

Verwaltungsreform

Die Verhandlungen zogen sich lange hin. Ende Mai aber wurden die Dinge spruchreif. Der *Neue Tag*, das offiziöse Organ der Prager Nazis, berichtete in der Ausgabe vom 27. Mai, wenige Stunden vor der Erschiessung Heydrichs:

„Am 26. Mai empfing Heydrich das Protektoratskabinett und informierte es über die Prinzipien der

Die Enttäuschung der Nazis drückt sich in ihren Massenmorden aus, die in der Ausmerzung eines ganzen Dorfes ihren furchtbaren Höhepunkt erreicht haben.

Panik in Quislinglager

Vollkommene Panik aber ist im Lager der Quislinge ausgebrochen. Sie versuchen, durch beispiellose Unterwürfigkeit gegen die Henker ihres Landes und Kriegserklärungen gegen das eigene Volk ihr zerstörtes Konzept doch noch zu retten. So erklärte der Quisling Moravec—dessen „Amt für Volksaufklärung" am 26. Mai aus Heydrichs Händen den Rang eines „Ministeriums" erhalten hatte, nachdem er Pläne zur Reduktion des höheren Schulwesens auf Gewerbe- und Fachschulen verkündet hatte—am 31. Mai im Rundfunk:

„Mit allen Mitgliedern des tschechischen Volkes, die ihrer legalen Regierung und ihrem legalen Präsidenten nicht gehorchen, wird erbarmungslos verfahren werden. Die tschechische Regierung wird dem Reich jede Hilfe in dem Kampf gegen dem Reich feindliche Elemente angedeihen lassen, um den Kampf gegen die Fünfte Kolonne in unserem Lande zu beenden und Ordnung und friedliche Arbeit für das Reich wieder herzustellen."

Dieses Versprechen des Quislings hat zwar

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noch nicht die Gen
der auf persönlich
selber die Mordak
Aber die „Náro
kündigte bereits
und tschechische
weiterführen wür
indirekten Feind
Reich der Verni
Damit ha
Schicksal an
aber nichts
dass ihr Ve
Tschechoslo
Reichs zu
worden ist.

Finnland in der Schwebe

Von unserem diplomatischen Korrespondenten

Warum flog Hitler nach Finnland? Nicht etwa, wie Berlin behauptet, um Mannerheim zum Geburtstag zu gratulieren, nachdem

mit der Wiedergewinnung der im Winter 1939/40 an Russland verlorenen Gebiete erreicht und hat ganz offensichtlich nicht die Absicht, weiter vorzudringen. Es denkt realistisch genug,

Operation Reinhard was named after top Nazi Reinhard Heydrich, who died in 1942.

MEPL/RITZAU SCANPIX/ DEUTSCHES BUNDESARCHIV

60 000 RM
koſtet dieſer Erbkranke
die Volksgemeinſchaft
auf Lebenszeit
Volksgenoſſe
das iſt auch
Dein Geld
Leſen Sie
Neues
Volk
Die Monatshefte des Raſſenpolitiſchen Amtes der NSDAP

This Nazi propaganda poster from 1938 was supposed to convince Germans that hereditary diseases cost society dearly.

CBW/ALAMY/IMAGESELECT

Poland. Wirth had distinguished himself as a highly competent employee in Aktion T4, where he had advanced rapidly and helped streamline the killing process.

Not only was Wirth a skilled leader and administrator of mass murder, he was also a rabid Jew-hater and unusually brutal – even for extermination camp personnel. One of Wirth's SS colleagues later stated:

"From my activity in the camps of Treblinka and Sobibór, I remember that Wirth in brutality, meanness and ruthlessness could not be surpassed. We therefore called him 'Christian the Terrible' or 'The Wild Christian'. The Ukrainian guardsmen called him 'Stuka' [after a German plane with a siren that howled loudly when the aircraft dived to attack]. The brutality of Wirth was so great that I personally see it as a perversity."

Through a series of brutal experiments that claimed thousands of Jewish victims, Wirth developed a system of mass murder in Bełzec that was used in all three Operation Reinhard camps. The system allowed a small crew – often only around 20 SS men supported by up to 100 Ukrainian auxiliary troops – to kill several thousand victims in a matter of hours. Upon arrival, train wagons were unloaded a few at a time so that the number of people on the platform never exceeded what could be mowed down with machine guns in the event of trouble. Next, the deportees were typically told by an SS officer that they had arrived at a transit camp where they had to bathe and be sanitised before they would be given food and drink, so they had to undress as quickly as possible. The women then had their hair cut by Jewish forced labourers. Finally, the victims were taken to the 'baths', which were actually gas chambers that were filled to capacity – often with extreme brutality.

YAD VASHEM

SS officer Christian Wirth developed the extermination system in the three camps.

Once the gas chamber doors were locked, exhaust gas from large engines was pumped into the rooms, where a panicked but futile struggle ensued amid desperate screams. When nothing more could be heard from the chambers, typically after about 20 minutes, the chambers were emptied of bodies by Jewish forced labourers.

In the early days of the camps, those killed were buried in huge mass graves. During 1942, however, it became increasingly clear that Nazi victory on the battlefield was not a foregone conclusion and unease about leaving evidence of the mass murder grew. Therefore, SS commander Heinrich Himmler ordered the bodies exhumed and burned, and all future victims were to be cremated, not buried.

By late summer 1943, the majority of Polish Jews had been murdered, and Operation Reinhard's main objective had been achieved. After the Treblinka uprising and the later and somewhat more successful Sobibór uprising in October 1943, where the prisoners killed all SS personnel present in the camp at the time, it also became clear that although the small camps were effective killing factories, they were not as safe for the guards as the much larger and better-guarded Auschwitz camp.

During the autumn, all three camps were closed, the buildings razed and the remaining working Jews brutally murdered. Trees were then planted in the grounds in a vain attempt to hide all traces of the mass murder.

At least 800,000 were murdered in Treblinka. In its sister camps, Bełzec and Sobibór, 170,000 and 434,500 were killed. The vast majority were European Jews, but thousands of Roma from all over Europe were also sent to their deaths in the three camps. ■

Jews from the Polish city of Zamosc were deported to Bełzec in April 1942. At least 170,000 were killed in the Nazi extermination camp.

WYDAWNICTWO MINISTERSTWA OBRONY NARODOWEJ

Samuel Willenberg received the highest Polish military honour, Virtuti Militari, before his death.

WORLD HISTORY ARCHIVE/ALAMY/IMAGESELECT

In 1944, the Polish resistance movement rose up against the German occupation in Warsaw. The hope was to capitalise on the Red Army's advance in Poland to take the Nazis by surprise and liberate the city. The rebellion ended up being brutally crushed.

his sisters' abandoned clothes in the camp at Treblinka.

In Warsaw, Willenberg could have kept a low profile and remained hidden until the Germans were defeated. However, he chose to throw himself into the Polish anti-German resistance movement instead, and a year after the Treblinka revolt, he took part in another uprising – this time in the Polish resistance's attempt to liberate Warsaw before the arrival of the Red Army. There he fought fiercely against the German troops for weeks, narrowly avoiding capture when the Polish freedom fighters were defeated by the Wehrmacht.

Shortly after the war, Samuel met his future wife, Ada, who asked if he knew anyone who wanted to rent a room. As a joke, Samuel replied that he would, but only if she married him. Two years later, they married, and emigrated to Israel in 1950. Introduced to the world of art from an early age by his father, Willenberg had a lifelong interest in drawing, and he now produced the most detailed sketches of Treblinka of any survivor. After retiring, he trained as a sculptor at the University of Jerusalem and cast many of his memories of Treblinka in bronze. These include Artur Gold's orchestra, his childhood friend Alfred Boehm with his pram full of rubbish, and a young woman called Ruth Dorfmann, whose hair Willenberg had to cut short before she was sent to the gas chambers and who politely asked him to remember her name – which he did.

> "There was Mother. She looked at me in disbelief … rubbed her eyes and whispered, 'Is it you, Samek?'"
>
> SAMUEL WILLENBERG ON HIS RETURN HOME

Samuel Willenberg died in 2016 at the age of 93. He had been decorated with the highest Polish military order for heroism and courage in battle, Virtuti Militari, a few years earlier.

He'd expressed a heartfelt wish that his sculptures would one day be exhibited in a museum in the camp from which he'd miraculously escaped so many years before.

At the opening of an exhibition of Samuel Willenberg's sculptures in Warsaw in January 2020, the Polish deputy minister of culture and national heritage stated that: "The best place for displaying these sculptures is where it all happened, the place from which he managed to escape – Treblinka. And so it shall be." A museum was opened at Treblinka to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the uprising in 2023. ■

A total of 140 Jewish concentration camp prisoners were brought to Sachsenhausen to take part in the largest counterfeiting operation in history.

POLFOTO/DPA & SCALA/BPK

COUNTERFEITERS IN CAMP

During World War II, the Nazis planned to drop millions of counterfeit pounds across Britain, causing the country's economy to collapse. The secret work was carried out by Jewish concentration camp prisoners. The day the counterfeiting was completed, they would all die.

By Hakon Mosbech

Bank of England
to pay the Bearer
the Sum of Five Pounds
1937 March 18 London 18 March 1937
For the Gov. and Comp. of the
BANK of ENGLAND
H.O. Peppiatt
Chief Cashier
Five

Before the meeting on 8th May 1942, SS officer Bernhard Krüger sensed that something big was brewing. He had been summoned to an urgent meeting and was to report to the head of SS foreign intelligence, Walther Schellenberg.

Krüger entered his superior's office in Berlin. The room looked like a cross between a fortress and a communications centre. It had a direct telephone line to Adolf Hitler, along with hidden microphones in the lights and photosensitive cells in the wall that could detect intruders. As a final precaution, Schellenberg had two machine guns built into his desk, aimed at visitors.

"I have asked you to come to me to transmit an important order from the Reichsführer SS," said Schellenberg, referring to SS leader Heinrich Himmler. "This order directs that the necessary measures be taken immediately for the fabrication of English pound notes."

The aim was to drop the counterfeit money across Britain so that civilians would pick it up and spend it. The large influx of money would cause inflation, make the country's economy collapse and destroy Britain's fighting power.

"The workforce is to be taken from the reservoir of prisoners of Jewish descent," added Schellenberg.

Skilled craftsmen

The decision to use counterfeit money as a weapon was made by senior SS officers as early as autumn 1939, two » weeks after the start of the war. But no one had foreseen how much difficulty the project would run into. It wasn't until 1942 that specialists at the Hahnemühle paper mill had produced a perfect copy of the specialised paper used by the Bank of England.

Now they had to move fast. Bernhard Krüger sent out an order to the major concentration camps: "You must inform me immediately about all Jewish prisoners who are from the graphic arts. Specialists in paper, or any other skilled worker (for example, hairdresser)," the directive read.

A ticket out of Auschwitz

Bernhard Krüger knew that Jews were a particularly suitable labour force for the task that bore his name – Operation Bernhard. They were highly qualified and could be easily disposed of once the operation was over.

One of the prisoners that caught Krüger's eye was Slovakian Jew and typographer Adolf Burger. After the German occupation of Slovakia in 1938, Adolf Burger had gone into hiding and produced masses of fake Catholic baptismal certificates for the country's Jews, to help them avoid deportation to the concentration camps.

The Gestapo had tracked Burger down and sent him to the Auschwitz concentration camp. As the months passed, Burger had became increasingly starved and haggard. He'd learned that his 23-year-old wife Gisela had been sent to a gas chamber. Now he was preparing to die himself.

One day he was ordered to report to camp commandant Rudolf Höss. Why? Burger could only think of one possible reason: he was being sent to the gas chamber.

BRITISH NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Bernhard Krüger was put in charge of the Nazi counterfeiting operation, code-named Operation Bernhard, in 1942.

"Prisoner Burger? Trade, typographer?" Höss asked when the Slovak arrived at his office.

"Yes, sir!" Burger replied.

"You are going to Berlin, Herr Burger. We need specialists such as yourself," said Höss in a friendly voice.

For the first time in 18 months, Adolf Burger had not been referred to as prisoner number 64,401. Even so, he was concerned about what awaited him.

Other selected prisoners were more optimistic, however. They would do anything to escape certain death in the concentration camps.

When a Dutch lithographer at Auschwitz was singled out, his friend Max Groen rushed to say that he had also worked in the trade. It was a desperate lie. Nevertheless, Krüger called him in and asked him what he knew about retouching photos.

Max Groen remembered a book he had been leafing through. "American retouching," he replied hesitantly.

"Oh, you mean positive retouching," said Krüger. Groen joined the team.

The prisoners were transported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp 30 kilometres north of Berlin. It was not an extermination camp – it provided labour for the arms and construction industries. Nevertheless, arbitrary executions and indiscriminate violence were rampant.

Adolf Burger was taken to a special section of the camp hidden behind a tall wooden fence, where barracks 18 and 19 were located.

Counterfeiters gathered

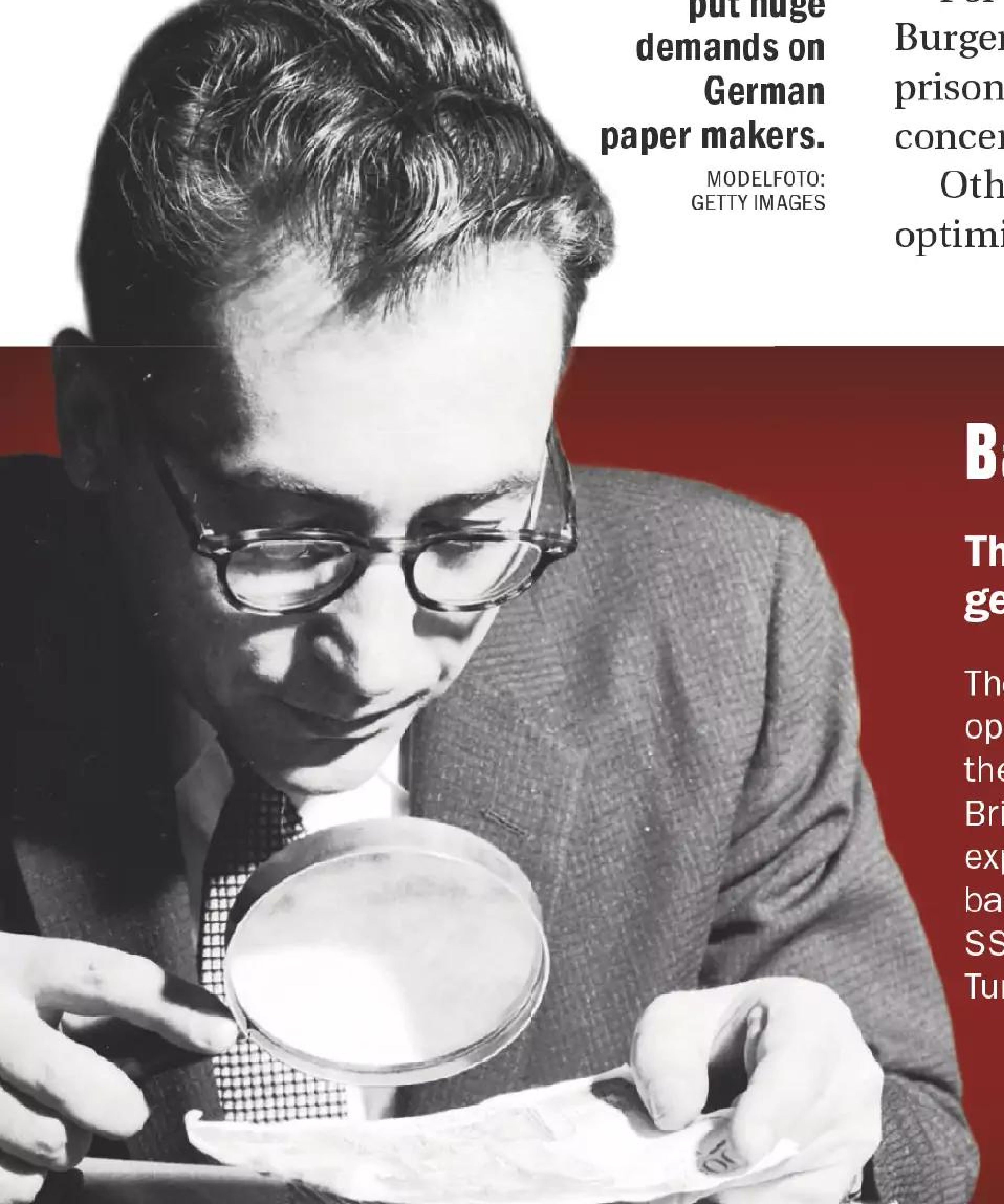
As the prisoners were hand-picked and arrived at Sachsenhausen, Krüger informed them of their upcoming task: they were to produce fake documents and passports – and, most importantly, millions of British pounds..

The work was top secret, he stressed. No one could have contact with anyone from the outside. That's why barracks 18 and 19 had their own guards and doctor. Krüger reminded them that he had saved them all from certain death in the extermination camps:

"If you work hard and do a good job, you will have nothing to fear. Some day the war will be over, then you will be able to leave this block. Of course, you

The counterfeiting put huge demands on German paper makers.

MODELFOTO: GETTY IMAGES

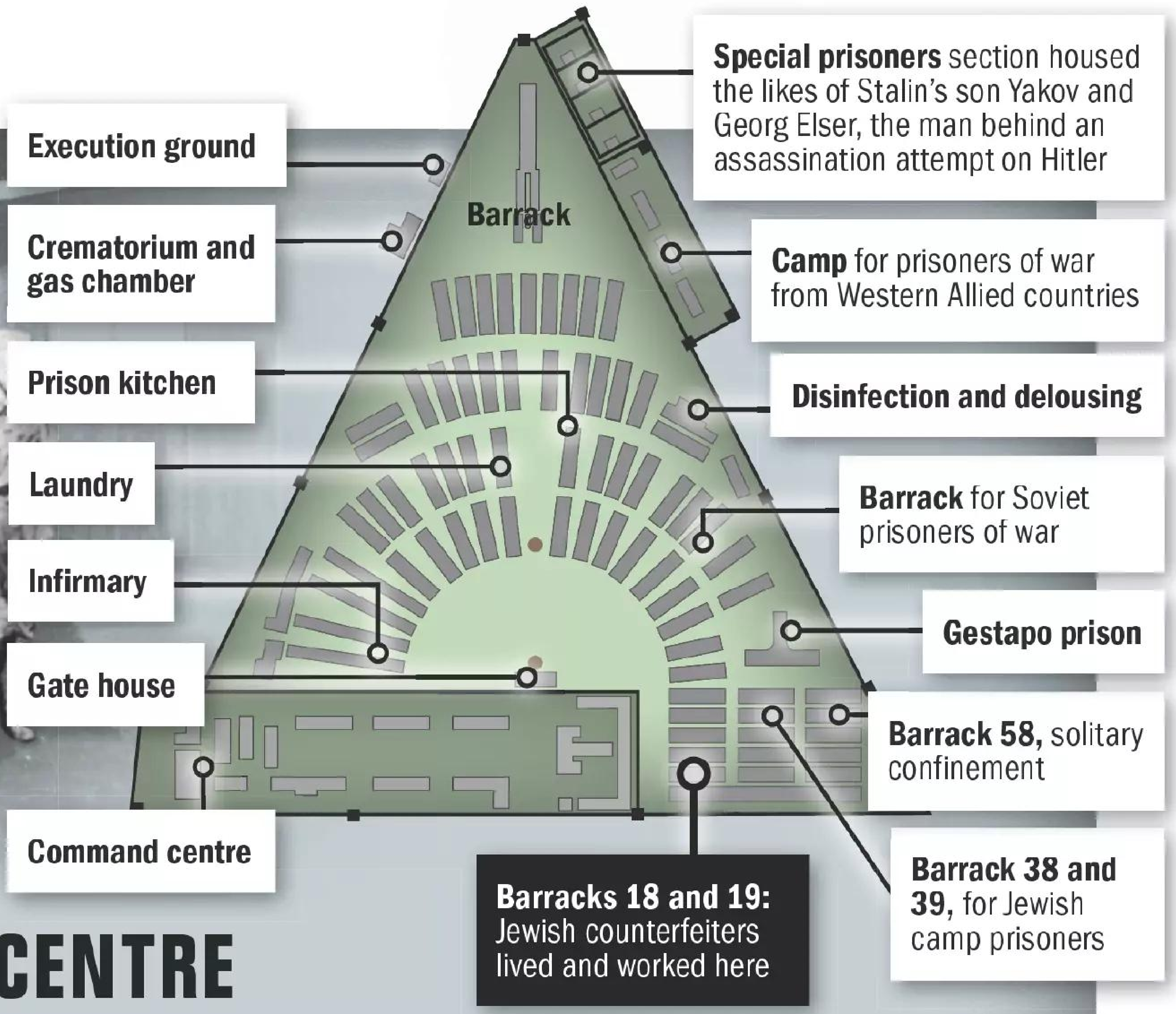


Banknotes made from old rags

The Bank of England used a type of paper that the Germans couldn't get their hands on. The search for an alternative took over a year.

The first step in the counterfeiting operation was to find out what paper the British were using. SS officers sent British banknotes for analysis, and the experts' answer was unequivocal: the banknotes were made of linen. So, the SS ordered several tonnes of flax from Turkey and had the first sample banknote made, but it felt wrong. The researchers tried adding different chemicals. To no avail. Finally, they realised where the fault lay: the British linen was used!

The Turkish linen was promptly distributed as polishing cloths among Berlin's factories. It was then collected, cleaned and processed into paper. A new


Execution ground
Crematorium and gas chamber
Prison kitchen
Laundry
Infirmary
Gate house
Command centre
Barrack
Special prisoners section housed the likes of Stalin's son Yakov and Georg Elser, the man behind an assassination attempt on Hitler
Camp for prisoners of war from Western Allied countries
Disinfection and delousing
Barrack for Soviet prisoners of war
Gestapo prison
Barrack 58, solitary confinement
Barrack 38 and 39, for Jewish camp prisoners
Barracks 18 and 19: Jewish counterfeiters lived and worked here

The special floor plan was to make it possible to control the entire camp with machine guns located above the gate.

CAMP WAS TRAINING CENTRE

The SS built Sachsenhausen in 1936. Located just 30 km north of Berlin, the camp's close proximity to Gestapo HQ gave it a special status in the Nazi concentration camp network: new guards and commandants were trained there.

A total of 200,000 prisoners were housed in the camp, where they were assigned to work for the Heinkel aircraft manufacturer and electronics company AEG, among others. Some prisoners were marched to death testing boots for the German Army. In total, around 100,000 prisoners perished there.

Among the most prominent prisoners were Joseph Stalin's eldest son Yakov Chugashvili, Georg Elser, who tried to kill Hitler with a bomb in 1939, and Danish communist leader Aksel Larsen, who later founded the SF (Green Left) party.

After World War II, the Soviet Union used Sachsenhausen as a prison camp for former Nazis and opponents of the new communist regime in the Soviet occupation zone.

Today, the camp is a museum of both the Nazi and Soviet eras.

SCANPIX/AKG-IMAGES/RIA NOWOSTI

must understand that we cannot give you your full freedom. Your work must remain a secret forever … Work hard and victory will be your reward," Krüger promised.

He had set up a complete counterfeiting workshop – or rather a factory – with an engraving workroom, photo lab, counting room and six modern printing presses, four of which were the latest model, Monopol Type 4.

The prisoners were relieved to be out of the extermination camps – in Sachsenhausen, they were even treated relatively well, with larger food rations, their own bed, a locker for personal belongings, and the right to wear civilian clothes.

On the other hand, the prisoners knew they harboured a secret that the Nazis would do anything to protect.

"I wasn't going to survive," Burger explained in an interview after the war. "When I went through the gates, I knew I'd die sooner or later. In my soft bed I had only one thought: I was a dead man on holiday." The men had lost family and friends in the camps. Now some of them saw a chance for revenge.

A printer from Berlin, Max Bober, tried to persuade the others to sabotage the operation by working sloppily and slowly: "We now have a weapon in our hands we must use," he said.

Most of the prisoners rejected the idea and concentrated on survival, with some pointing out that they were lucky to have a roof over their heads, because they didn't have to watch people

team of specialists set about copying the British watermarks, which appeared as a special combination of light and dark marks in the paper. Finally, by December 1940, the SS knew everything about the British paper.

Vow of silence at paper mill

The actual production of the banknote paper was outsourced to the Hahnemühle mill near Hanover. Founded in 1584, it had the necessary expertise in producing speciality paper. Before being installed in a factory building north of Berlin, the paper-makers had to swear never to mention their task. Over the next year, they conducted numerous experiments to find out how the banknotes could be mass-produced.

During this process, several British secrets emerged. For example, it turned out that the original banknotes were coated with special chemicals that gave the edge a fluorescent colour when wet.

In spring 1942, Hahnemühle was finally able to start production.

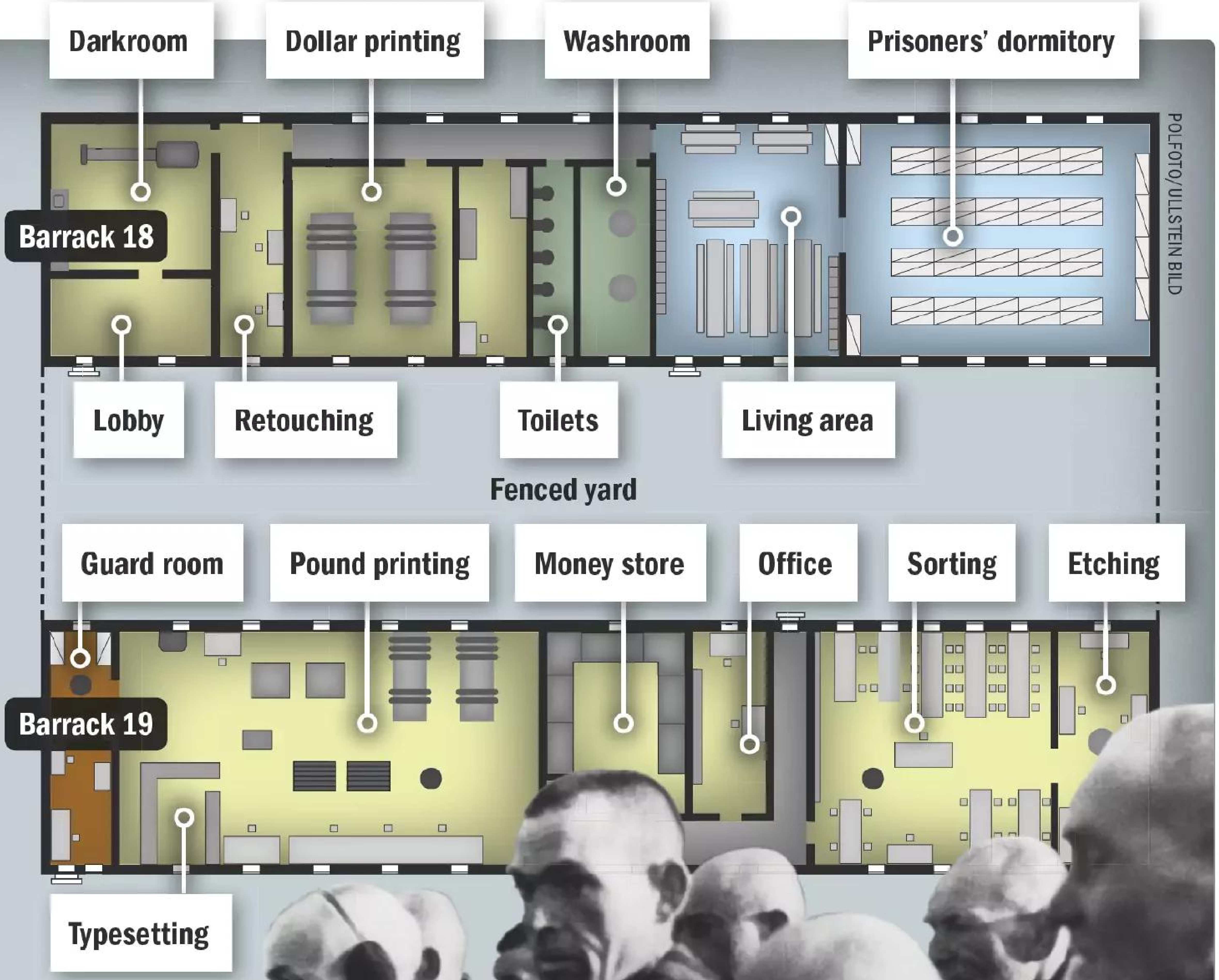
The workers at the paper mill had to swear to silence over the special order issued by the SS in 1940.

ELISABETH SANDMANN VERLAG & POLFOTO/ULLSTEIN BILD

NAZIS' SECRET MONEY FACTORY

Hidden behind a three-metre-high fence were the two barracks that housed Operation Bernhard. The counterfeiting workshop was so secret that not even the armed guards patrolling the fence knew what was going on. As an extra precaution, the guards were frequently changed and sent to the Eastern Front.

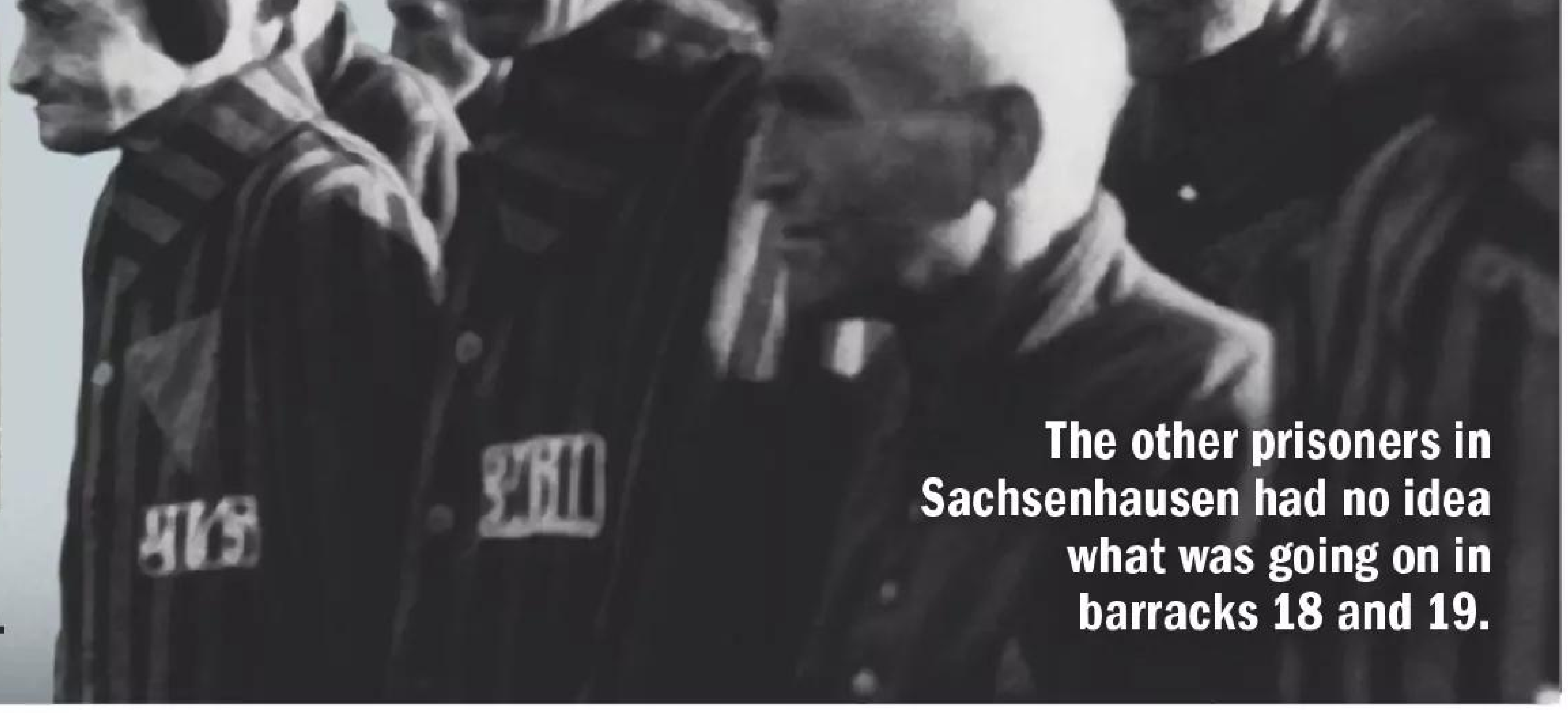
The 140 prisoners could move freely in their barracks and breathe fresh air in the courtyard, but they could not see the outside world. This is how the head of the counterfeiting operation, SS officer Bernhard Krüger, ensured that the operation remained a secret until the end of the war.



POLFOTO/ULLSTEIN BILD

The area between the two barracks served as a fenced-in yard. The prisoners were isolated from the rest of the camp.

ARCHIVES OF THE FORMER SOVIET UNION & SCALA/BPK



The other prisoners in Sachsenhausen had no idea what was going on in barracks 18 and 19.

freeze to death. They wanted to make the best of the situation.

Bank approved notes

None of them had been counterfeiters before the war. As they tried their hand, they learned the craft, becoming familiar with engraving and printing techniques. They had to find the secret British security marks on the banknotes. The image of Britannia in particular drove them crazy with its microscopic details and hidden marks.

Everything had to be perfect, Krüger had ordered. With each attempt, the prisoners got better and the forged notes became more accurate. The gruelling work was done in two shifts and the machines ran relentlessly. Piles of £5, £10, £20 and £50 notes poured out of the printing press.

All the notes were scrutinised and sorted by quality. Then they were counted and bundled like in a real bank. The money-making warehouse became known as the Bank of England. But Krüger wasn't satisfied until the

A note with hidden traps

Fearing counterfeiters, the Bank of England provided its banknotes with a myriad of secret security marks.

Before the Nazi counterfeiting programme could begin, the SS and the concentration camp prisoners from Sachsenhausen had to identify all the security marks that the Bank of England had put on its banknotes. Apart from the watermark and quality of the paper, most of the identifying marks were secret – only employees of the Bank of England knew about them.

One of the most important marks was the serial number on the banknote. German mathematicians laboured for months to find the formula that created a 'genuine' serial number using the date of issue. Other security marks were barely visible to the naked eye or looked like printing errors. In reality, they were carefully laid traps. To spot them, real British banknotes were enlarged six times and scrutinised.

For example, the concentration camp prisoners discovered that the Britannia motif in the top-left corner of the banknote contained three secret marks: five dots on the figure's right hand, a special shadow on her spear and a broken hairline. The prisoners came to call her "Bloody notes had passed a particular test. One day in 1943, a prisoner under guard was sent to the Reichsbank in Berlin with a folder of counterfeit money. The notes had to be exchanged to see whether the cashier would recognise the forgery. Every single one was accepted.

Sick were executed

One of the first conditions that the prisoners had to get used to was total isolation in the middle of the otherwise overcrowded concentration camp. One day, a fire broke out in the roof of one of their barracks. However, guards with machine guns prevented the prisoners from escaping and stopped outside firefighters from coming in to help. In order to save their lives, the prisoners had to hastily organise their own firefighting efforts.

> **“Work hard and victory will be your reward”**
>
> BERNHARD KRÜGER, HEAD OF COUNTERFEIT OPERATION

Uncertainty also hung constantly over their heads. Illness and industrial accidents could mean death, because Krüger refused to send anyone for treatment at the Sachsenhausen infirmary. That might have jeopardised the top-secret operation. Instead, the sick were killed – as happened to a young teacher from Poland who tried to hide his tuberculosis. When he coughed up blood one day, Krüger made short work of him. A total of seven sick prisoners were executed during Operation Bernhard.

But Krüger was careful not to be too brutal. The prisoners' spirits had to be kept up. He knew from experience that disgruntled workers could slow down production. His prisoners, in particular, had a strong incentive to slow down the work, because as long as the operation was running, they were allowed to live.

Purpose of operation changed

Krüger decided to combine the carrot and the stick: discipline the prisoners with threats and motivate them with hope. He would win their trust with a bonus for good work: a rest day on Sundays, tobacco rations and better food. He even set up table tennis in the courtyard between the barracks and allowed them to listen to German radio.

“It was a nerve-wracking period,” Norwegian prisoner and stereotyper Moritz Nachtstern wrote afterwards. “Had they discontinued the plant, the road to the crematorium wouldn't have been long for us.”

The Nazis did not stop counterfeiting. Quite the opposite. They had a new idea: instead of dropping the money over England and causing economic chaos, it would be used to give Germany an advantage in the war. The country desperately needed foreign currency to buy weapons and raw materials – and pay its foreign agents. With the near-perfect counterfeit notes, the country had millions of pounds at its disposal.

To lead this part of the operation, the SS appointed the legendary swindler, Nazi, spy and arms dealer Friedrich Paul Schwend.

The concentration camp prisoners also produced counterfeit Yugoslavian and Italian banknotes to create inflation there.

ALL OVER PRESS & ELISABETH SANDMANN VERLAG

Through his marriage to a baroness, he had gained access to the highest circles of society and lived a life of luxury in Italy during the war. Now he built up a network of around 50 men who exchanged counterfeit money with gullible banks in Switzerland and made deals in neutral countries.

“We were able to get everything that was in short supply during the war, from US jeeps to bottles of iodine,” Schwend boasted after World War II.

Krüger opened a dollar workshop

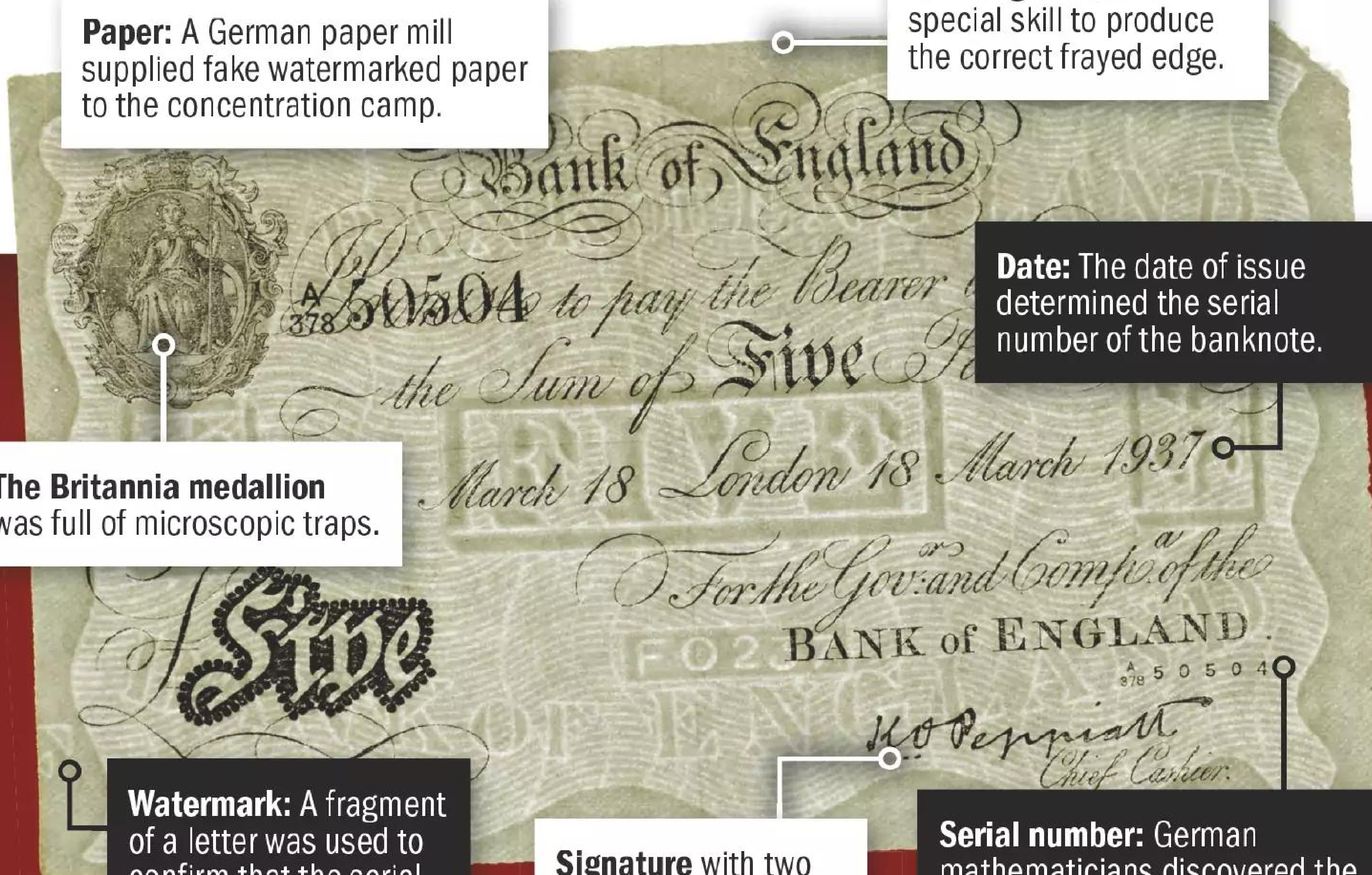
Krüger entered the counterfeiting workshop. It was September 1944 and the counterfeiting had been going on for about two years. “From today, we are going to produce dollars, too.”

The decision coincided with the arrival of a new prisoner. In August

»

Britannia”. There were also three seemingly innocent-looking dots next to the pound sign of the note, and two dots under the head cashier's name.

With all the security marks mapped out, the prisoners were finally able to start counterfeiting.


Bank of England
A 378 50504 to pay the Bearer
the Sum of Five
March 18 London 18 March 1937
For the Gov. and Comp. of the
BANK of ENGLAND
Five
K.O. Peppiatt
Chief Cashier

Paper: A German paper mill supplied fake watermarked paper to the concentration camp.

Torn edge: It took a special skill to produce the correct frayed edge.

Date: The date of issue determined the serial number of the banknote.

The Britannia medallion was full of microscopic traps.

Watermark: A fragment of a letter was used to confirm that the serial number was correct.

Signature with two important small dots.

Serial number: German mathematicians discovered the formula that used the issue date to produce a ‘genuine’ number.

The fake pounds were so well made that after the war, the Bank of England issued new notes – this time containing security thread.

KENNETH BO DRABÆK

Lake Toplitz is isolated in the mountains near Salzburg. Rumour has it that the Nazis hid untold treasures at the bottom of the lake.

POLFOTO/RIA NOVOSTI

MILLIONS OF POUNDS DUMPED IN A MOUNTAIN LAKE

In the last days of the war, several lorries travelled to Lake Toplitz. Local residents watched as SS men sailed out and dropped heavy boxes into the water.

Rumours swirled about the Austrian Lake Toplitz, 80 kilometres east of the city of Salzburg.

During World War II, the German Navy established a secret research unit there to develop new types of weapons. In the final days of the war, several large lorries travelled up the narrow forest road to Lake Toplitz bearing heavy, watertight crates. Local residents were ordered to drag the crates down to the shore, where German soldiers were ready to sail them out and dump them in the 100-metre-deep lake.

It was believed that the boxes contained stolen gold and gems, cash and important documents that the Nazis wanted to save.

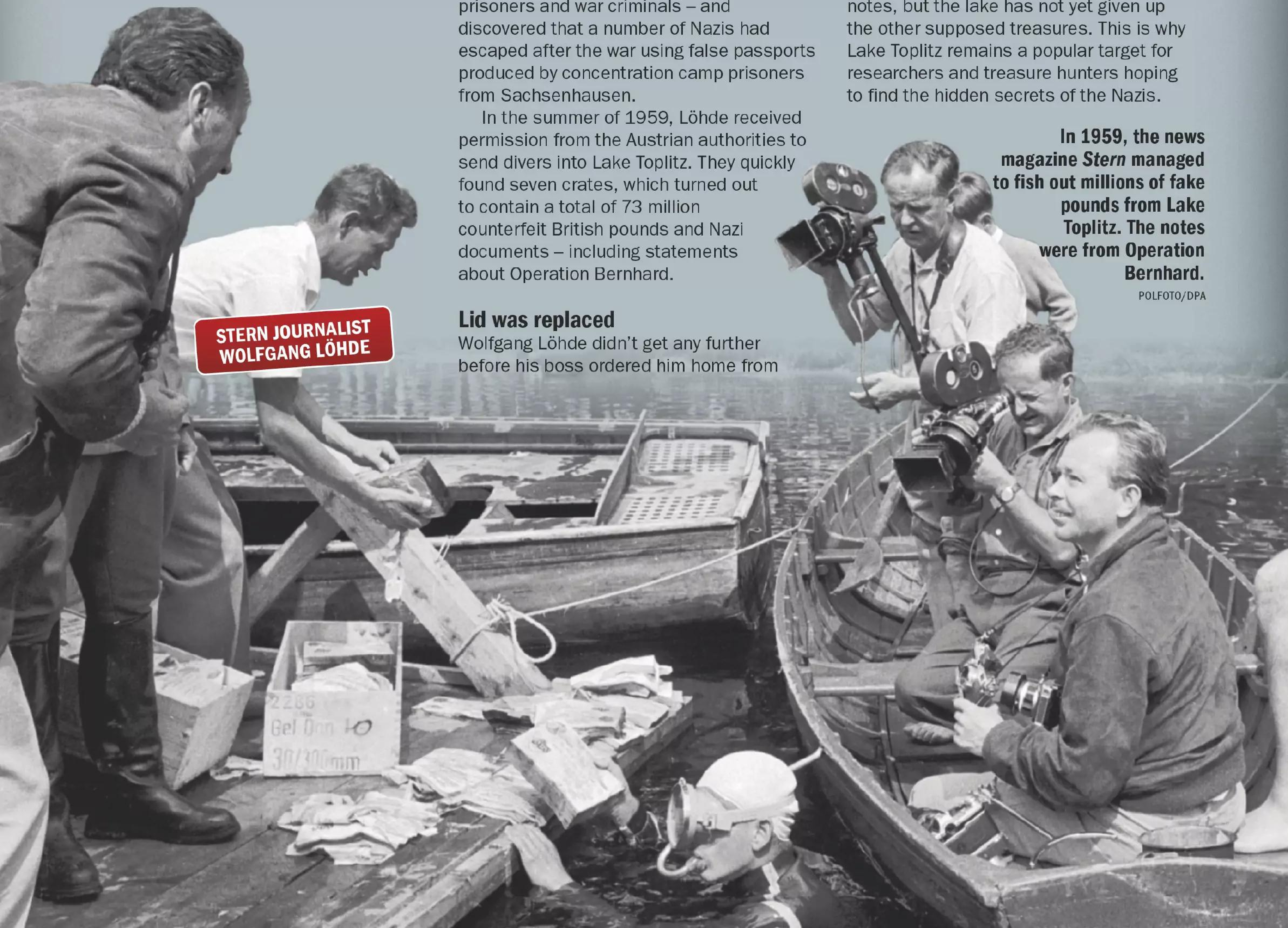
In the 1950s, journalist Wolfgang Löhde from the weekly magazine *Stern* decided to investigate further. He sought out eyewitnesses, concentration camp prisoners and war criminals – and discovered that a number of Nazis had escaped after the war using false passports produced by concentration camp prisoners from Sachsenhausen.

In the summer of 1959, Löhde received permission from the Austrian authorities to send divers into Lake Toplitz. They quickly found seven crates, which turned out to contain a total of 73 million counterfeit British pounds and Nazi documents – including statements about Operation Bernhard.

Lid was replaced

Wolfgang Löhde didn't get any further before his boss ordered him home from his research in Austria. Why this happened is unclear. Perhaps the case had become too controversial for the nascent West German state, because the documents from the lake might have revealed that the state's supporters had become rich with the help of fake money from Sachsenhausen.

In the following decades, Toplitz has been searched several times by divers. Each time they found counterfeit pound notes, but the lake has not yet given up the other supposed treasures. This is why Lake Toplitz remains a popular target for researchers and treasure hunters hoping to find the hidden secrets of the Nazis.



In 1959, the news magazine *Stern* managed to fish out millions of fake pounds from Lake Toplitz. The notes were from Operation Bernhard.

POLFOTO/DPA

1944, a scrawny, ragged 57-year-old Soviet was brought into the camp.

"By profession I am a counterfeiter and am recognised, even by my enemies, as a master in the field," announced Salomon Smolianoff.

"Now we have our expert," Krüger declared, but the fortunes of war had changed for Germany. As early as 6th June 1944, the prisoners had heard Radio Berlin's reports of the Allies' attack – what became known as D-Day. The prisoners knew time was running out. Instead of working hard, they slowed down and waited for the end.

Bombs rained down on Berlin. Maybe Sachsenhausen would also be wiped out by a merciful bombing raid, the prisoners hoped. It would be better than death in the gas chamber.

The forgery of dollars never really got off the ground – just 200 banknotes were printed. One day in March 1945, Krüger's Mercedes rolled through the camp gate. "Our superiors in Berlin have decided to move the plant to a safer location," he said.

"By profession I am a counterfeiter and am recognised, even by my enemies, as a master in the field"

SOVIET COUNTERFEITER SALOMON SMOLIANOFF

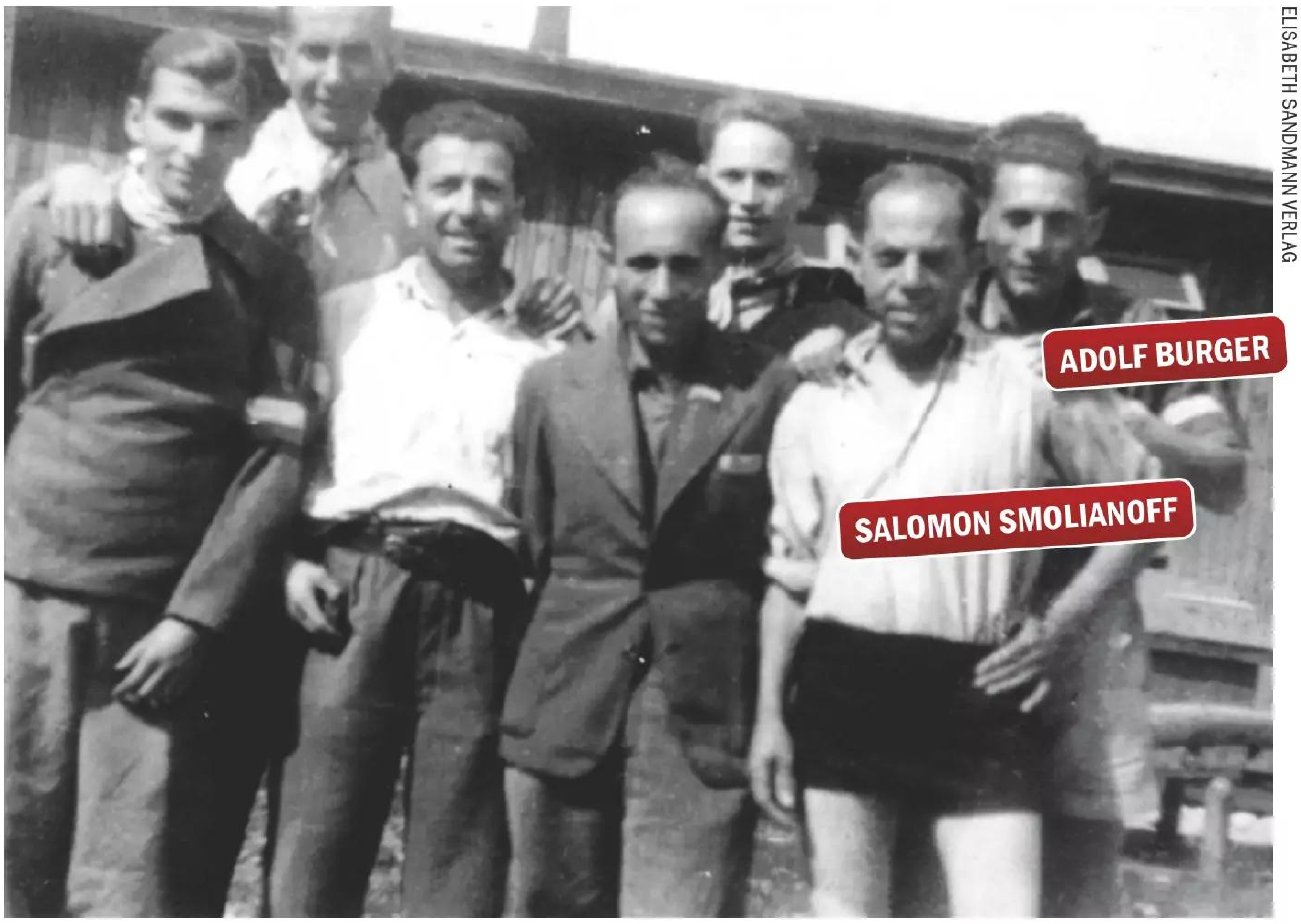
The prisoners were given 36 hours to pack the entire counterfeiting factory into boxes and load them on a train. They feared execution, but the SS had prepared comfortable transport: heated cattle trucks with piles of hay so the prisoners could rest on their way south to the Redl-Zipf camp near Salzburg.

There, production was meant to resume in a tunnel. Krüger paid his prisoners one last visit. He looked tired.

"Today I am still wearing my uniform. Who knows what will happen in the next few days?" he asked, putting his arm around Smolianoff's shoulder. "I have issued orders to have you moved to a place of safety until you are liberated."

The SS actually planned to bury the prisoners alive in the tunnel, but they didn't have time before the Americans liberated the concentration camp.

Max Groen, who had lied his way into Operation Bernhard, met a US sergeant. The American started talking about his family and pulling pictures out of his uniform pocket. Groen took a quick glance at them. "Just give me one good cigarette," he said.



ELISABETH SANDMANN VERLAG

On 5th May 1945, the nightmare was finally over. The prisoners could leave their camp and return to their home countries.

Postscript

After liberation, Adolf Burger dedicated his life to the fight against Nazism. His 1997 book The Devil's Workshop *was made into a film* (The Counterfeiters), *which won an Oscar in 2008.*

The leader of the operation, SS officer Bernhard Krüger, was briefly captured by the Allies but escaped. For several years, he went into hiding with his old paper supplier, the factory manager of Hahnemühle. Until his death in 1989, he avoided prosecution for the largest counterfeiting operation in history and the execution of seven sick prisoners. ■

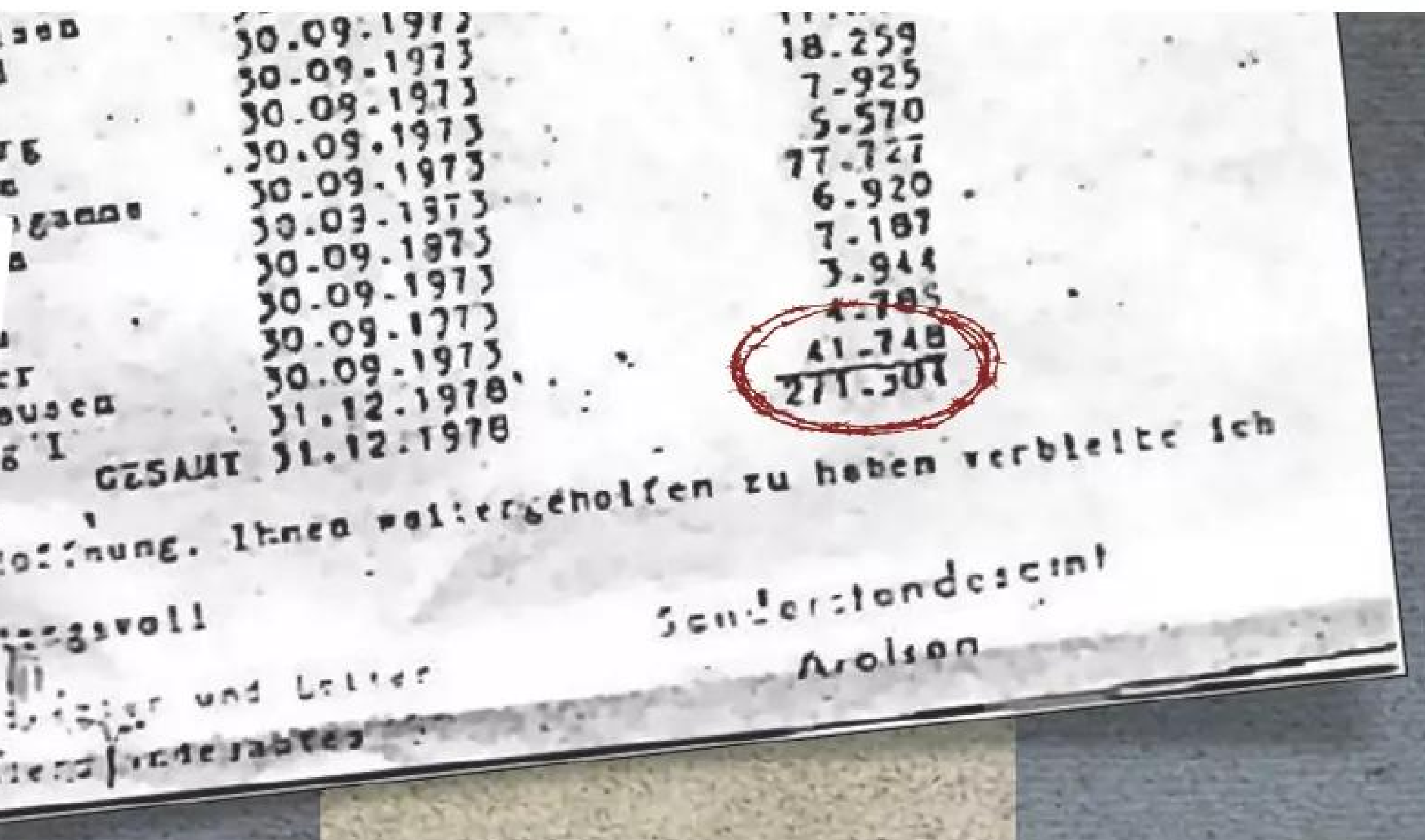
Dirty and riddled with holes

New notes arouse suspicion. That's why a special group of prisoners was responsible for crumpling them, dirtying them and pricking them with pins.

During the printing process, the concentration camp prisoners added chemicals to the ink to slightly mute the colour. The sheets were then placed on a drying rack and torn into four single notes with a steel ruler. Finally, the sides were roughened with a metal rasp to imitate the uncut edge, but the notes still looked new. A number of prisoners with dirty hands therefore gave the notes a used look by rubbing, folding and curling them. The notes were also pricked with pins because the Germans knew that English bankers used pins instead of rubber bands when they bundled the notes. The prisoners wrote English words in genuine English ink and stamped the names of English banks on the back – all to give each banknote a 'life story'.

The notes were then smoothed and bundled. They were perfect – ready to be used in Europe.

The banknotes actually had one small flaw: to warn of the counterfeit, the prisoners stuck a pin through the Britannia motif. They figured that a British banker would never do that.



Bergen-Belsen 30.09.1973 18.259
Buchenwald 30.09.1973 7.925
Dachau 30.09.1973 5.570
Flossenburg 30.09.1973 77.727
30.09.1973 6.920
30.09.1973 7.187
30.09.1973 3.944
30.09.1973
30.09.1973 41.748
30.09.1973 271.301
31.12.1978
GESAMT 31.12.1978

Hoffnung, Ihnen weitergeholfen zu haben verbleibe ich

Sonderstandesamt
Arolsen

LIBERATION, REVELATION AND PUNISHMENT

As the Germans were beaten back, more and more concentration camps were liberated by Allied soldiers. A huge clean-up operation could now begin: the surviving prisoners had to be nursed back to strength and the criminals brought to justice.

BRITISH AIRCRAFT BOMBED NAZIS' PRISONERS

Four and a half thousand concentration camp prisoners were taken on board the former luxury liner *Cap Arcona*. The wretched captives hoped they would be sailing to freedom. But all hope died when British bombers opened fire on them. The Brits were convinced that the passengers on the *Cap Arcona* were high-ranking Nazis fleeing to Norway. A deadly – and tragic – mistake.

By Stine Overbye

The quay in Lübeck was teeming with prisoners dressed in ragged, striped prison garb. Emaciated, exhausted and almost unable to stand on their own two feet, they leant on each other for support as they waited to be ferried out to the *Cap Arcona*. On the horizon, the prisoners could see the luxury steamer anchored in the Bay of Lübeck.

None of the prisoners knew for sure what would happen once they boarded the *Cap Arcona*, but according to rumours among the wretched group of women, men and children, rescue was now very close. After surviving months and years of unimaginable suffering in the Neuengamme concentration camp near Hamburg – or in one of its 90 branch camps in northern Germany – the prisoners finally had a glimmer of hope. The *Cap Arcona* would evacuate the concentration camp prisoners to Sweden, it was rumoured, and it was only a matter of time before they would be sailing towards freedom on the other side of the Baltic Sea.

The first train wagons loaded with thousands of starving concentration camp prisoners arrived at the Lübeck dock on 19th April 1945, and more and more wagons arrived over the following week. Out of them crawled large groups of skeletal and sick people. Some were so emaciated that they fell out of the carriages and on to the ground. Several had died on the way because they'd had nothing to eat or drink, but those who had survived the horrors were in better spirits than they'd been in a long time. They were convinced that Hitler's heyday was over, that the Allied forces had gained the upper hand, and that liberation was just around the corner.

What the prisoners didn't realise was that Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, had ordered that under no circumstances must the concentration camp prisoners fall into enemy hands alive. As the Allies had advanced further and further into Germany, the Nazis had cleared the concentration camps. Some prisoners had been sent

Weakened prisoners from the Neuengamme concentration camp near Hamburg were taken aboard the luxury liner *Cap Arcona* (left) by the Nazis. The prisoners believed they were being taken to Sweden.
SCANPIX/CORBIS

on long death marches with no final destination, while others had been herded into train wagons that had transported them further north to Lübeck. Their fate was still uncertain.

On the *Cap Arcona,* a former luxury liner incorporated into the German Navy, Captain Heinrich Bertram had been ordered to take the prisoners on board: *"Cap Arcona* will be cleared promptly for receiving a few thousand refugees from the concentration camps," read the telegram he received from the SS leadership in mid-April.

Captain forced to relent

Until recently, Bertram's ship had been transporting defeated German troops from the Eastern Front back to Germany, but now it was anchored off Neustadt in northern Germany. The proud ship was no longer gleaming white, as it had been when it had travelled the Atlantic bearing wealthy passengers. It was now painted dark grey, but its sheen had been preserved. The railing was mahogany and brass, the hardwood panoramic windows were intact behind protective plates, and the interior oozed exclusivity. Heavy chandeliers hung from the high ceilings, thick Persian carpets covered the stairs, and the walls of the saloons were covered in green silk.

Bertram considered the ship to be his kingdom, and the idea of the *Cap Arcona* being turned into a floating concentration camp was repugnant to him. Both he and the ship's owner, the Hamburg-South America Line, had done everything in their power to look after the ship. They hoped it would be able to return to regular service as soon as the war ended. Now, however, the future was more than uncertain, and neither Bertram nor the shipping company could get clear information about the SS elite's plans for the prisoner transport. Both parties feared the ship would be lost with all hands, but fervently hoped that the prisoners would simply be sailed to Sweden.

Again and again, Bertram refused to accept the involuntary passengers, so the freighter *Athen* had to return to the port of Lübeck having failed in its task, after sailing alongside the *Cap Arcona* on 20th, 21st and 24th April to deliver its cargo of prisoners. Bertram stuck to his guns: there were no supplies on board for so many people. Nor were there enough rescue equipment or toilets, he pointed out.

On 26th April, the captain was forced to halt his resistance. SS officer Christoph-Heinz Gehring arrived at the *Cap Arcona* in a motorboat and brought with him an ultimatum: Captain Bertram had to immediately allow all the prisoners on the *Athen* to be taken on board. Otherwise, he'd be shot on the spot. The captain realised he had no choice. "Do you know I have a wife and two young children, and for that reason, I will go with this insane order," Captain Bertram reluctantly replied.

Prisoners were living dead

On the freighter *Athen*, the prisoners lay close together. With aggressive shouts and blows from the SS guards, they had been herded on to the ship that would take them to *Cap Arcona*. Using the halyards, they had climbed down into the deep holds, and many were now badly injured after falling from great heights because they couldn't cling on to the ropes. Squeezed into the icy holds, they were unable to move. There was no food or water, and with no access to toilets for the more than 2,000 people in the holds, the stench was foul.

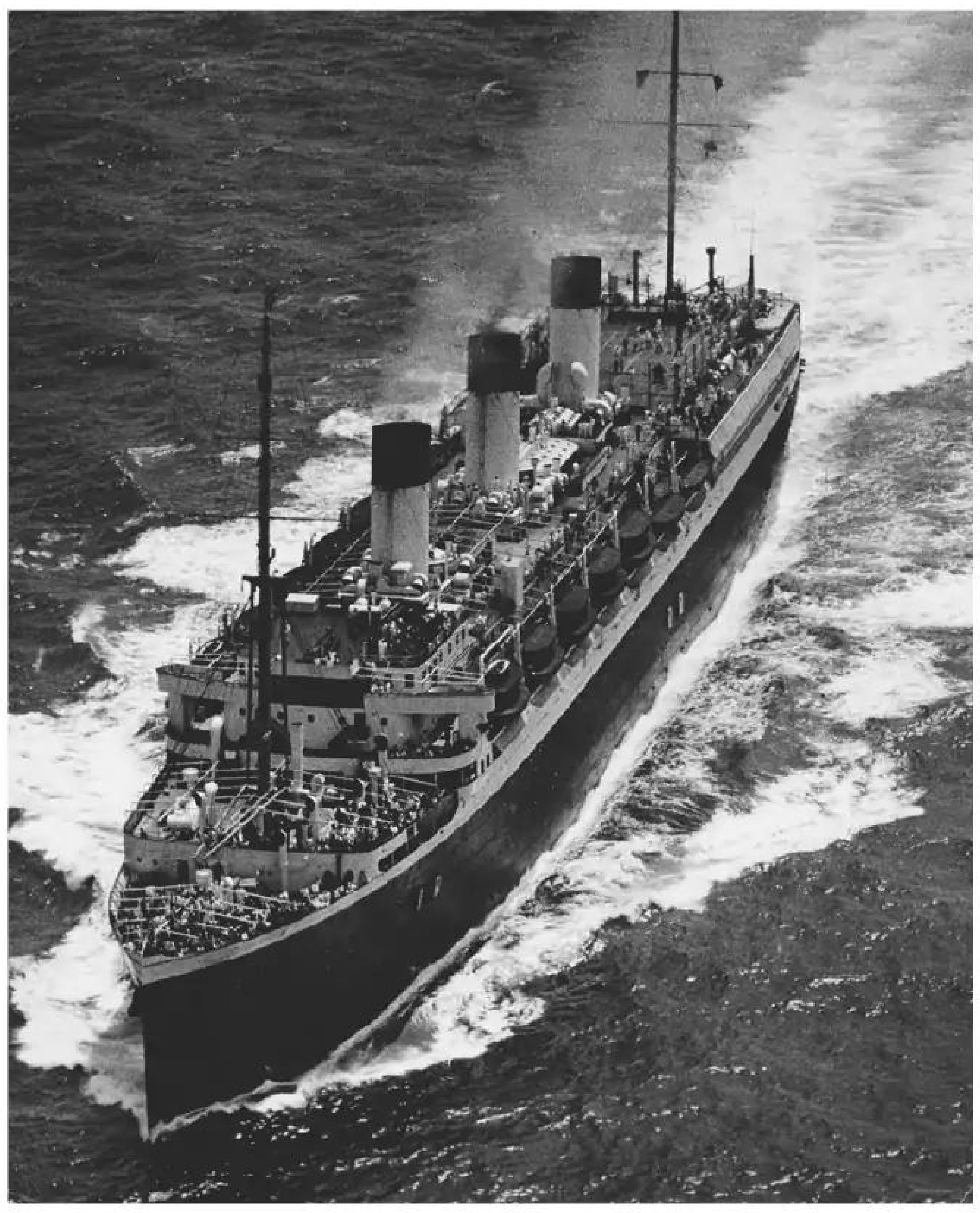
On the afternoon of 26th April, the *Athen* once again docked alongside the *Cap Arcona*, and this time the captain and his crew took on the live cargo as ordered. Even though the *Cap Arcona* had sailed several times carrying wounded German soldiers from the front and the crew had seen many shocking sights, they were taken aback by the plight of those now boarding.

"They were living dead who stumbled ... uncertainly along the gangway. Some supported others. Only a few prisoners seemed to be German. You hear Russian, Polish, Czech and French – and many other languages. There were old and young people. Or did they just look so old? They streamed on board in hundreds," noted Fritz Schwarz, the chief steward who had sailed on the *Cap Arcona* for 18 years.

The prisoners marvelled at the luxury that greeted them on the *Cap Arcona*. Their scrawny hands stroked the mahogany of the railing and they walked in rows across the thick carpets, squinting up at the chandeliers and staring in horror at their decaying reflections in the huge mirrors hanging everywhere. The contrast to the squalid barracks of the concentration camps was overwhelming and the prisoners' eyes shone as they realised they were in a floating luxury hotel.

Bodies lay in piles

For three days, the *Athen* sailed back and forth between Lübeck and the *Cap Arcona* carrying prisoners, and by 29th April there were approximately 6,500 captives on board. Some were assigned a luxury cabin with a shower but no water. Others – mainly captured Soviet soldiers – were locked in the deepest compartment, which the crew called the banana room. It was dark and damp, and the space was so cramped that you couldn't stand up. There was no fresh air and it wasn't long before the first prisoners began to succumb to a lack of oxygen. Every day, a boat carrying drinking water arrived at the *Cap Arcona*, and when it returned, its hold was filled with corpses.



ULLSTEIN BILD

The luxury liner *Cap Arcona* had plenty of room, but when it was loaded with thousands of the Nazis' prisoners, there was a shortage of air, food and water. Soon the bodies began to pile up.

Lacking food and fresh air, people died en masse and piles of naked, starved bodies piled up on deck. The SS guards believed that the bodies should simply be thrown overboard, but the crew of the *Cap Arcona* insisted that the dead should be buried on land.

On 30th April 1945, the *Athen* docked alongside the *Cap Arcona* once again. This time, however, the freighter did not come to deliver but to pick up prisoners. The SS guards on board the *Cap Arcona* had realised that the situation was untenable – the ship was so crowded and the stench so overwhelming that the SS ordered that almost 2,000 people had to be taken back to the *Athens*.

Jubilation broke out

In clear, sunny weather, those prisoners lucky enough to have access to a porthole could glimpse the coast, hoping to spot the British tanks that they knew were on their way.

The news that British troops had crossed the Elbe and established a bridgehead in Schleswig-Holstein had reached the *Cap Arcona*. And when

2,750 PRISONERS WENT DOWN WITH THIELBEK

On board the freighter *Thielbek*, anchored in the Bay of Lübeck, 2,800 concentration camp prisoners were crammed so tightly together that they lay on top of each other. From the deck, the crew could see the British bombers attacking the *Cap Arcona* and a white flag was hastily hung on the mast to signal surrender. However, about an hour after the bombardment of the *Cap Arcona*, four Hawker Typhoon bombers attacked the *Thielbek*.

The lifeboats on board were riddled with gunfire and almost all SS guards and sailors were killed, while only 50 of the concentration camp prisoners escaped the burning ship before it listed and capsized in 15-20 minutes. According to eyewitnesses, the British planes continued to fire on the people fighting for their lives in the cold water.

In 1949, the ship was salvaged, restored and put into service under the name *Reinbek*, until scrapped in 1974.

Captain Bertram told a prisoner, Erwin Geschonneck, on the evening of 1st May that Hitler had committed suicide and the Red Army had captured most of Berlin, the news spread like wildfire. The end of the war was just around the corner, the prisoners realised, and the mood aboard the ship lifted noticeably. On 2nd May, a motorboat docked at the ship and 22 young SS women came on board. Fear was painted on their faces as they announced that the British had now marched into Lübeck, which had surrendered without a fight.

The next day, the sky buzzed with British planes flying low over the *Cap Arcona* and other German ships in the Bay of Lübeck. The sight made a powerful impression on the prisoners, who swarmed on to the deck and cheerfully waved to the pilots above their heads. The German crew hoisted the white flag as a sign of surrender, and soon white sheets and towels fluttered from every mast and deck.

British feared Nazi flight

With concern, the Allies realised that the entire Nazi administration, plus the army and navy leadership, had moved up into northern Germany to avoid the enemy, which was pushing ever further up the country. Every day, British surveillance planes reported large concentrations of ships in the waters off Lübeck and Kiel, and the Allies feared that the Nazi leadership was planning to escape via the Baltic Sea to Norway, which was occupied by the Germans.

To avoid this situation at all costs, the British were preparing to destroy the ships before they put to sea. No one realised that several of the vessels had been turned into floating prisons, because although a British spy in Lübeck had realised they were prisoner transports and tried to pass the intelligence on to his superiors, the information never made it further up the RAF's command chain.

At 04.00 on 3rd May 1945, Royal Air Force Squadron Leader Martin Rumbold was woken by a soldier placing a mug of tea by his bed. An hour later, Rumbold reported to the operations centre at Ahlhorn airfield near Oldenburg. There, an intelligence officer briefed Rumbold and the seven other pilots in the squadron on the day's target: a convoy of ships in the Baltic Sea. The order Rumbold and his men received was simple: Operation Order No. 71 stated that aerial photographs showed extended enemy ship movements emanating from the harbours in Schleswig-Holstein, and the objective was to destroy those shipping convoys.

Later, the pilots were driven out on to the runway to eight waiting Hawker Typhoons, which soon took to the sky and one by one broke through the thin cloud cover.

All hell broke loose

It was 14.30 on 3rd May as Rumbold and his squadron approached the *Cap Arcona*. Rumbold was oblivious to the many cheering people on the ship, nor did he notice the white flag waving from the mast or the white pieces of cloth waved by the prisoners. His eyes were focused on the crosshairs, and with the target locked in, he gave the order over the radio to engage.

Immediately, bombs began to rain down on the *Cap Arcona,* which for a moment looked as though it was being lifted out of the water.

The eight aeroplanes attacked again and again, and the *Cap Arcona* was quickly transformed into a floating fireball. The whole ship shook, and as the first bombs fell, panic and confusion ensued. An attack was the last thing

LUXURY LINER TRANSFORMED INTO A PRISON CAMP

The *Cap Arcona* offered lavish luxury cruises until the ship was incorporated into the German Navy in 1939, when wealthy cruise passengers were replaced by wounded soldiers and concentration camp prisoners.

When the *Cap Arcona* set sail on its maiden voyage from Hamburg to Buenos Aires on 19th November 1927, the ship was filled with 1,315 millionaires and wealthy travellers. Even before its maiden voyage, the ship had gained a reputation for being the finest of the finest, with the rich queuing to buy tickets to the floating palace of silk-lined saloons, sumptuous dining rooms and gleaming luxury shops.

The *Cap Arcona* – or *Queen of the South Atlantic*, as the luxury liner was also known – was the flagship of the Hamburg-South America Line. In the almost two weeks it took to cross the Atlantic, a host of crew members looked after the travellers, and in first class each passenger had two waiters at their disposal. Star chefs prepared exquisite meals, masseurs soothed sore muscles, and when the dance band played a waltz in the evening, the ship's ballroom was filled with men in tuxedos and women in evening gowns.

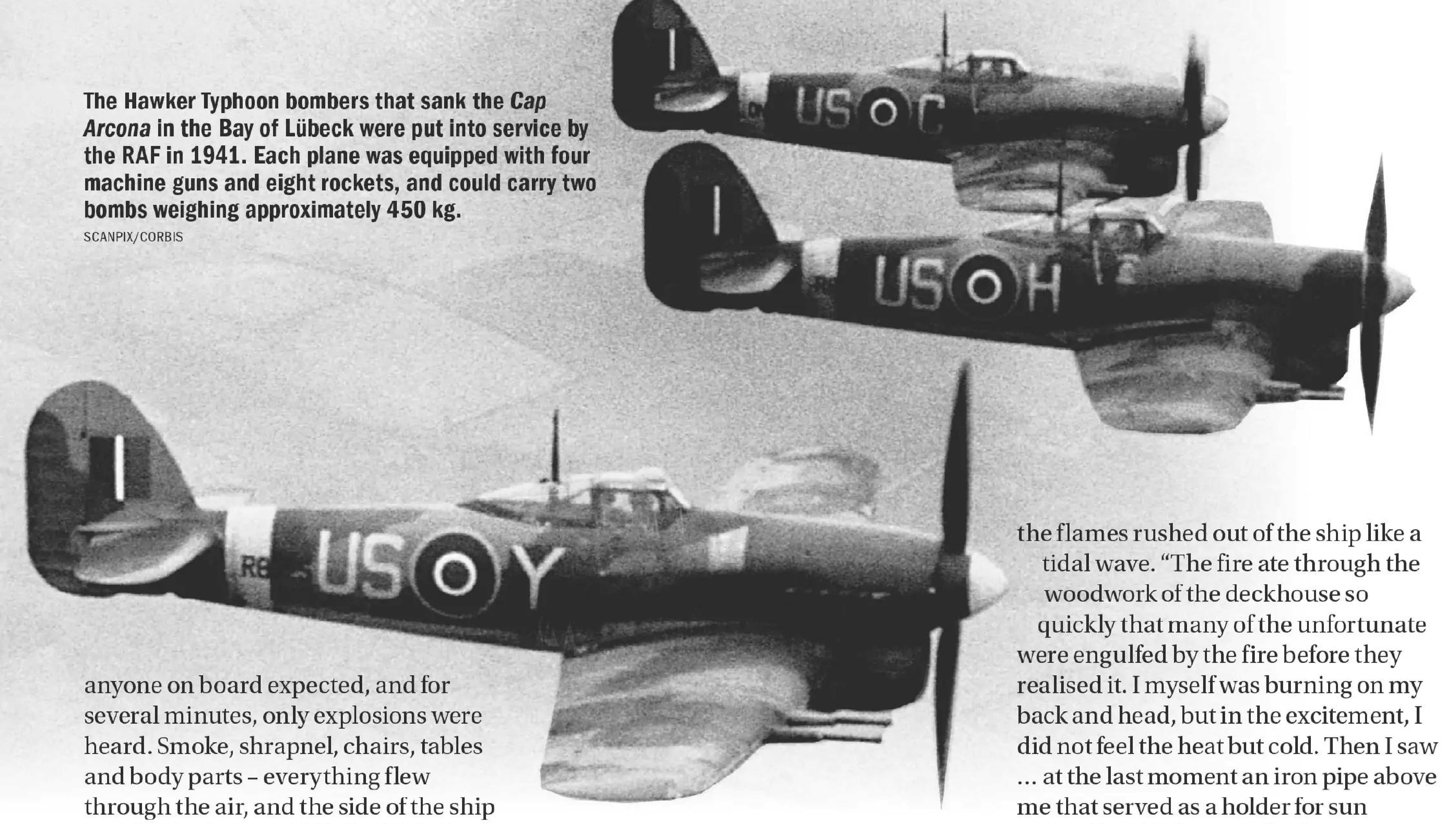
During the day, travellers could enjoy a game of tennis or a swim in the indoor pool, unless they preferred to stroll on the promenade deck or enjoy a cool drink in a deckchair.

When the *Cap Arcona* docked in Hamburg on 25th August 1939 after its 92nd return voyage across the Atlantic, the adventure was over. War had broken out and the luxury liner was incorporated into the Kriegsmarine. The white ship was painted dark grey as camouflage against air raids, and after almost a year in Hamburg, the *Cap Arcona* was transferred to Gdynia in what is now Poland in November 1940, where she served as a barracks ship until 31st January 1945.

After that, the ship was used to transport German refugees, and it sailed civilians and defeated troops from East Prussia to western Germany and Copenhagen.

The stairs were covered with Persian carpets and the walls covered with fine silk when the *Cap Arcona* sailed across the Atlantic in its heyday.

POLFOTO/TOPFOTO



The Hawker Typhoon bombers that sank the *Cap Arcona* in the Bay of Lübeck were put into service by the RAF in 1941. Each plane was equipped with four machine guns and eight rockets, and could carry two bombs weighing approximately 450 kg.

SCANPIX/CORBIS

anyone on board expected, and for several minutes, only explosions were heard. Smoke, shrapnel, chairs, tables and body parts – everything flew through the air, and the side of the ship and the deck were riddled with holes from the bombs. For a few seconds, the attack was followed by silence, but the calm was quickly replaced by screams.

Terrified, many began to jump overboard, and prisoners rushed out from the cabins into the corridors, where fire had already taken hold. Like living torches, they swarmed through the smoke-filled corridors, while many fell lifeless to the burning floors.

The majority of people trapped in the banana room or elsewhere in the ship's interior suffocated or burned to death in minutes. And even those who managed to make it to the deck were in mortal danger; the British planes returned, this time firing machine guns into the crowd. Some of the prisoners shouted warnings as the shots hammered down and killed indiscriminately.

The fire was now completely out of control. Only in the prow had the fire not yet taken hold. From all directions, people were crawling and running towards this part of the ship. Anyone who fell was trampled to death in the crowd, and as the temperature continued to rise and the smoke became more and more suffocating, hundreds chose to throw themselves into the sea because they saw no other way out.

Prisoner Alexander Machnew tried to fight his way through the crowd, hopelessly awaiting their fate. He recalled: "I pushed my way through them on the left side of the ship and saw there were people swimming around far below us. Some were sinking, others were reaching out for those swimming beside them, and together they sank into the depths. In the panic, no one was able to scramble up from the deeper decks. They got in each other's way. We threw a rope down from the deck, but everyone immediately reached for it. This made it impossible to pull our comrades up one by one. We only had one rope long enough to reach the water. But the flames were already approaching the hatch. The fire took hold of hundreds of our comrades. The wild screams merged into a single roar. People were burning before the eyes of their comrades who were higher up. And there was no way to save the burning ones."

> **"More than 200 charred people fused into a lump from which a horrible stench streamed"**
>
> HEINRICH MEHRINGER

Another prisoner, Heinrich Mehringer, was trapped in the crowd as the flames rushed out of the ship like a tidal wave. "The fire ate through the woodwork of the deckhouse so quickly that many of the unfortunate were engulfed by the fire before they realised it. I myself was burning on my back and head, but in the excitement, I did not feel the heat but cold. Then I saw ... at the last moment an iron pipe above me that served as a holder for sun umbrellas. With a stretched arm, I reached it and with superhuman powers I pulled myself up ... Then I came to stand on the heads of the many assembled people ... maybe ten people were lucky enough to do the same as me, then the fire had taken command of the conglomeration. We now ran for our lives on our comrades' heads, like on a street. The people below us were standing so close together that we could not fall through."

At the railing, they climbed over and on to a small middle deck, where there were already 300 people.

"On the deck above us, all our comrades burned. After a while, the fire had no nutrition any more. A silence of death lay upon us. As soon as we could, we tried to look up and we were offered a terrible image: more than 200 charred people ... fused into a lump from which a horrible stench streamed."

Charred bodies were piled up everywhere, and even in the bunks there were dead bodies that had been trapped trying to escape. Some of the prisoners were so thin that they escaped through the portholes, while others were left dangling. Their upper bodies sticking out of the round windows, but their lower bodies had burned inside the room.

Even the prisoners who had jumped into the sea had little chance of survival. About 50 metres from *Cap Arcona,* there were three lifeboats, but there were so many people that the boats were in danger of sinking beneath the waves.

Lifeboats capsized

In the water, many people were clinging desperately to the railings of the lifeboats. The fight for survival was relentless. Those who had managed to climb aboard had trampled on the hands and heads of those swimming in the water. Then, almost simultaneously, two of the lifeboats capsized and suddenly all the rescued people were back in the water. It was impossible to get back in the boats as no one was heeding anyone else and everyone was just trying to save themselves. Some people swam to the third boat, which also capsized due to the influx. At that time of year, the water was very cold and as the starving prisoners had no strength, their limbs quickly seized up. Some had jumped from the *Cap Arcona* wearing life jackets, but at a height of around 20 metres, even a strong swimmer had to be lucky to reach the water unscathed. One man floated on top of another who was already dead, the life jacket keeping them both afloat.

Above the promenade deck, a dozen men tried to free another lifeboat, but smoke billowed around them and they groped blindly. The boat was hanging crookedly from the ropes, with the bow pointing downwards, but several still jumped aboard. Suddenly, one of the ropes burned through and the people who had managed to get inside plunged screaming into the depths. The front rope also broke, and the lifeboat fell on the heads of the people fighting for their lives in the sea below.

The lifebuoys thrown into the sea also became death traps because they sank with the people clinging to them, said Soviet prisoner Alexander Machnew: "As the lifebuoys resurfaced, people swam to them from all sides in the hope of saving their lives. But the lifebuoys were overloaded by the mass of people clinging to them. In this disaster, two small lifebuoys pulled hundreds of people into the depths."

Germans were rescued

During the afternoon, the fire ate through the entire ship, and slowly the *Cap Arcona* began to list. Prisoner Alfred Knegendorf realised where the ship was heading, and with all his might held on to the rail, waiting for the ship to capsize even more. Then he slid down and sat on the hot keel, where he was soon joined by other surviving prisoners who had fought their way out of the cold water.

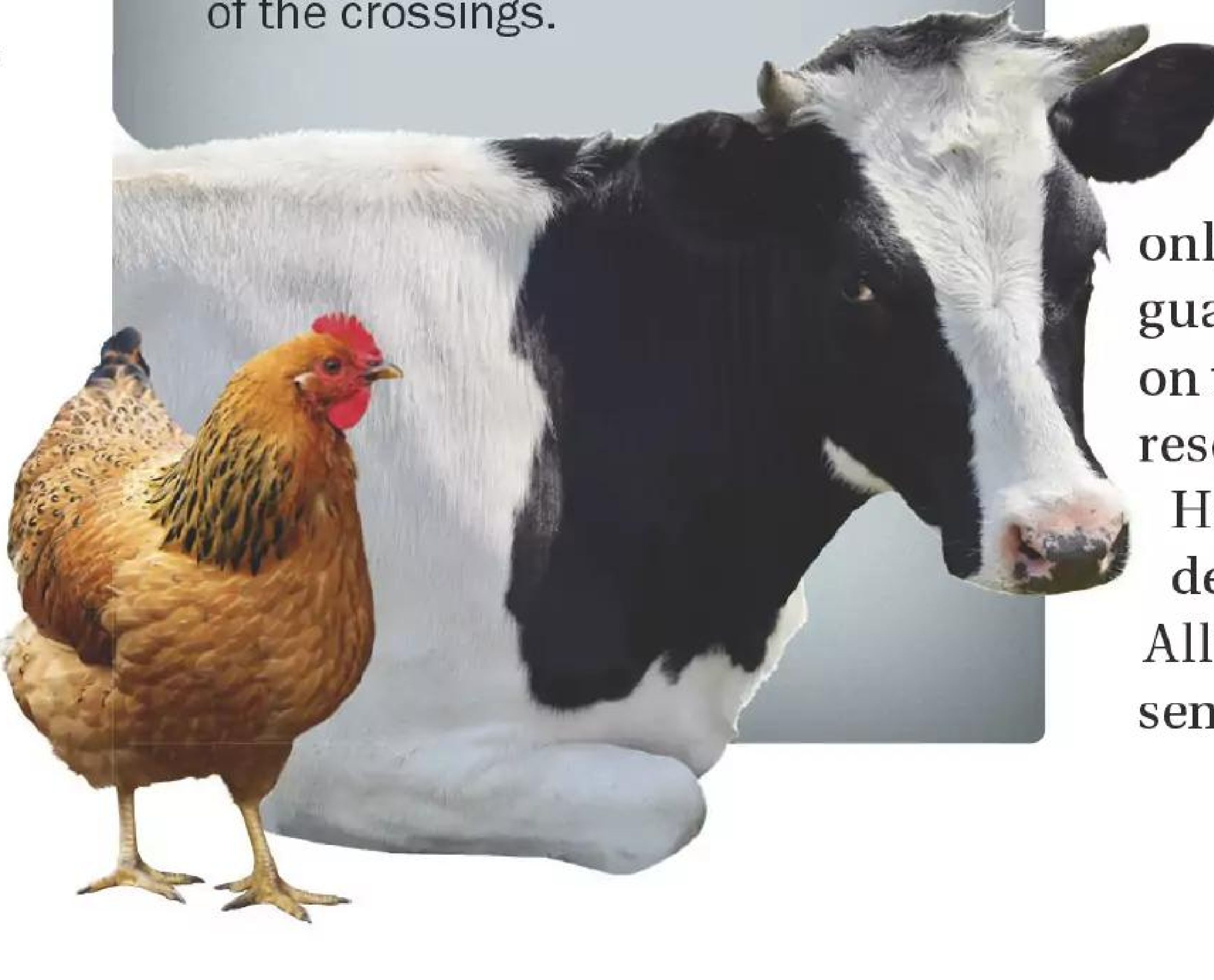
All afternoon, they sat on the side of the ship, wounded and exhausted, waiting to be rescued. Shoals of bodies floated by in the sea, and in despair and helplessness, the survivors watched their fellow prisoners still fighting for their lives in the icy sea.

After what seemed like an eternity, help seemed to arrive. Small vessels appeared on the horizon and those who were still managing to cling to life breathed a sigh of relief. But their hope quickly died. "German soldiers!" a German officer shouted into a megaphone to the castaways.

STARS AND ANIMALS ALSO TRAVELLED

Not only rich people travelled the Atlantic in the *Cap Arcona.* Film stars and pets were also on the passenger list.

In addition to several millionaires, a number of prominent actors were also on board when the *Cap Arcona* crossed the Atlantic – such as American film star Clark Gable. Animals also frequently appeared on the ship's passenger list. On the maiden voyage, one woman brought her 14 dogs, all of which were comfortably accommodated in two luxury cabins. A Brazilian family, who appreciated fresh milk and freshly laid eggs, was accompanied by a cow and a flock of live chickens during one of the crossings.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Soviet Alexander Machnew watched in horror as the Germans pushed the prisoners aside, hitting the fingers of those clinging to the edge of the boat, before shoving them mercilessly into the water. As more and more people clung to the boat, they started firing. "They shot the comrades floating in the water. Those who were shot in the rapid fire disappeared into the water without a sound."

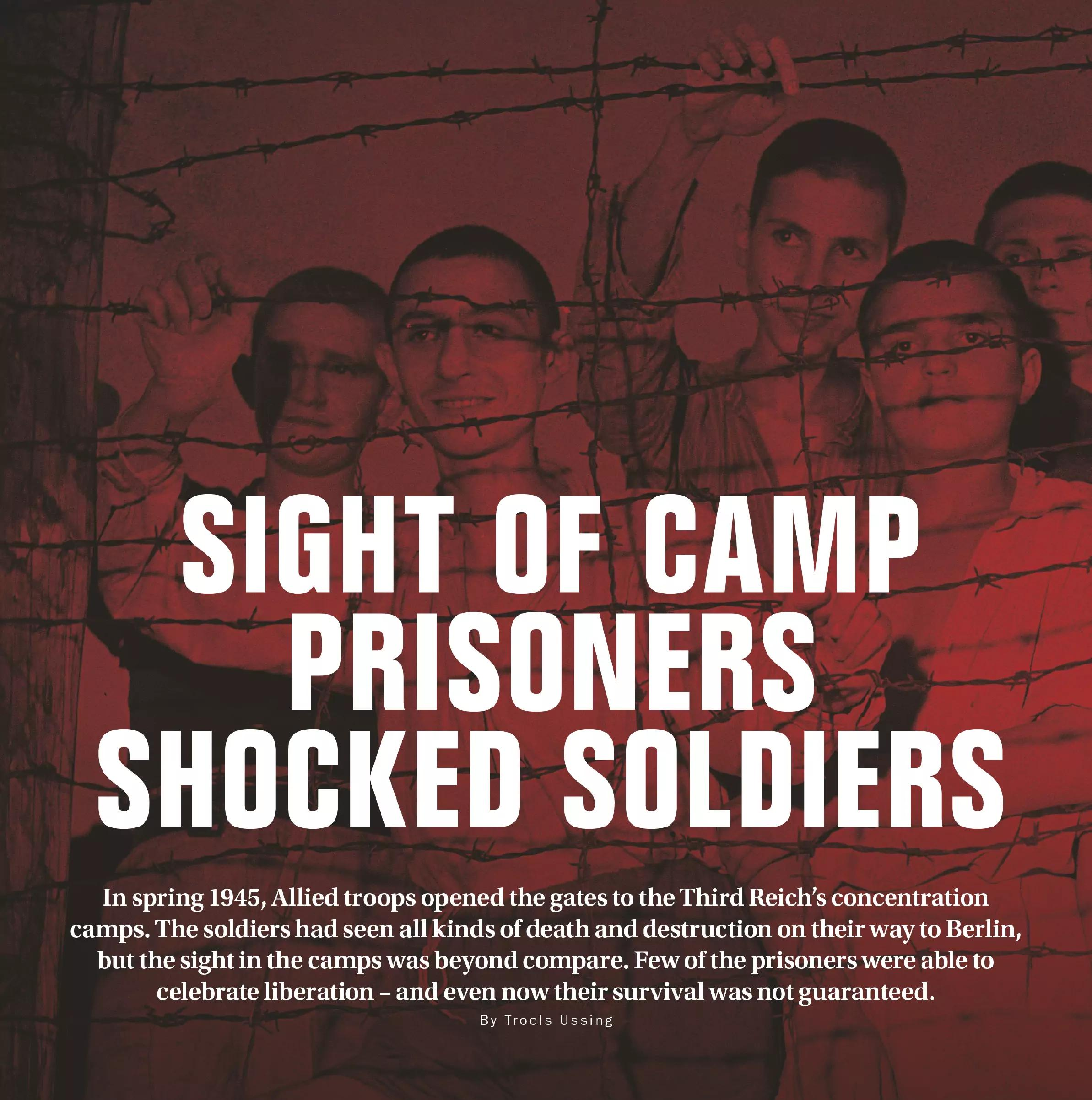
As machine-gun fire mixed with screams, afternoon turned to evening. On the hull of the capsized ship, hundreds of people were still waiting, not knowing whether it was for death or rescue. In the darkness, they suddenly heard a motorboat approaching. It was a tug, which a British rescue team had deployed in an attempt to find survivors.

"We were aft and had to run along the hot hull towards the bow. The surface was so hot that we had to lay planks one in front of the other, taking the lead one and putting it in front so that we could walk over them. Everybody helped, gradually the weakest were also transferred," said prisoner Heinrich Mehringer

After half an hour of sailing, the tug docked at the quay in Neustadt, which the British had captured. Weak at the knees, the survivors went ashore, one after the other. Finally, with solid ground under their feet, they were free.

A few days later, peace came to Europe, and in the midst of the jubilation, the disaster in the Bay of Lübeck was pushed into the background. But a list of the rescued and the dead speaks volumes about the hell that the British pilots initially described as "brilliant attacks".

Of the approximately 4,500 concentration camp prisoners who'd been held on the *Cap Arcona,* only 350 survived. And of the 670 guards, SS, sailors and crew members on the ship, as many as 490 were rescued, including Captain Bertram. He had feared that the Nazis would destroy the ship. Instead, it was the Allies who, in the cruellest of ironies, sent their own to their deaths.



SIGHT OF CAMP PRISONERS SHOCKED SOLDIERS

In spring 1945, Allied troops opened the gates to the Third Reich's concentration camps. The soldiers had seen all kinds of death and destruction on their way to Berlin, but the sight in the camps was beyond compare. Few of the prisoners were able to celebrate liberation – and even now their survival was not guaranteed.

By Troels Ussing

The stench tore at their nostrils and grew worse with every metre that US Captain Belton Cooper and the rest of the 3rd Armored Division drew closer to Nordhausen in central Germany. The German troops had abandoned their positions the night before, and all should have been calm. Cooper and his driver were driving slowly into town in their jeep when they were stopped by a major in the US division. He was as white as a sheet. "Cooper, we've seen a lot of grim things in this war together, but there's something in the next block that you won't believe until you see it," the major stammered.

The captain ordered the jeep into gear. As it rounded the corner, a rickety creature with striped trousers and a naked torso appeared. Cooper thought the figure looked like a ghost. The poor thing's skin looked like transparent plastic stretched over the ribs and shrunken to the bones. "I never thought I'd see a live, walking ghost," said Cooper's driver, clearly shaken.

The stranger's torso was so emaciated that the Americans couldn't tell whether the figure was male or female. The face didn't give any clues either. All that remained was a wasted skull with eyes that had sunk into dark holes. As the jeep rolled further down the street, more skeletons in pyjamas appeared. Most of them had collapsed on the

US soldier handing out cigarettes to liberated prisoners at Dachau concentration camp.

US ARMY/GETTY IMAGES/
MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE/GETTY IMAGES

pavement and road – trying to get as far away as possible from their tormentors. Cooper struggled to comprehend what he was seeing. But the horrifying visions had only just begun. Around the corner, the Nazi concentration camp Dora-Mittelbau awaited.

US and British soldiers liberated the concentration camps on the Western Front.

ULLSTEIN BILD/GETTY IMAGES

Soviets saw horrors first

For Captain Belton Cooper and the other US soldiers on the Western Front, the worst fighting was behind them. By early April 1945, Hitler's army was demoralised and most Wehrmacht soldiers had realised that the battle was lost. The Soviets were rapidly approaching Berlin from the East, while US and British forces pressed on from the West. The Third Reich was being crushed like a piece of strudel dough.

As the Allies advanced, the Germans had to repeatedly evacuate the concentration camps closest to the front. In some camps, the Nazis had covered their tracks to the best of their ability, but as the enemy advance accelerated, camp commanders had no time to burn the evidence. Camps were abandoned in haste, and while the soldiers forced the majority of the prisoners on long death marches to the Reich's other concentration camps, the weakest were left behind the barbed wire fences.

The Nazis carried out such an emergency evacuation at the Majdanek concentration camp in eastern Poland when the Red Army approached in the summer of 1944. More than 12,000 prisoners had been taken west, so when the Soviet soldiers drove through the camp gate on 23rd July 1944, only "1,500 cripples" remained, as the Soviets put it. The colossal mountains of shoes, suitcases, dresses and coats in the warehouse testified to what a slaughterhouse the camp had been.

After the liberation of Majdanek, the Soviets had to wait six months for the next big revelation, when Auschwitz appeared behind the snow-covered forests in southern Poland in January 1945. Almost 60,000 prisoners had been evacuated, but around 7,000 sick people still lay around the huge complex.

"I opened the door to one [barrack]. The stench was overpowering. It was a women's barracks, and there were frozen pools of blood, and dead bodies lay on the floor. In between them lay those still alive, semi-naked, only wearing thin undergarments – in January! My soldiers recoiled in horror. One said: 'I can't stand this any longer. Let's get out of here. This is unbelievable!'" recalled commander Anatoly Shapiro.

The Soviets documented their discoveries with photos and films, which were sent to the propaganda department in Moscow. Initially, reports of the findings only appeared in Soviet newspapers, which the US and Britain did not trust. The reports were seen as a propaganda stunt – even though the concentration camps were known to exist, it was assumed that they could not have been that monstrous. In the spring of 1945, however, the British and US forces would see the truth – and more – for themselves.

Liberators found living skeletons

Although many US and British soldiers had heard of the concentration camps

ALLIES ALREADY KNEW ABOUT GENOCIDE

Throughout the war, awareness of the Nazi mass extermination grew – but few believed the evidence.

1941

Nazis exterminate Soviets

August: Even before the Nazis launch the Final Solution, the Allies receive reports that Hitler is exterminating civilians – specifically Soviets in Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine. "Thousands of executions in cold blood are being perpetrated by the German police troops," says Winston Churchill in a radio address to the British.

A Soviet peasant woman's house is burned by the Nazis.

MONDADORI/GETTY IMAGES

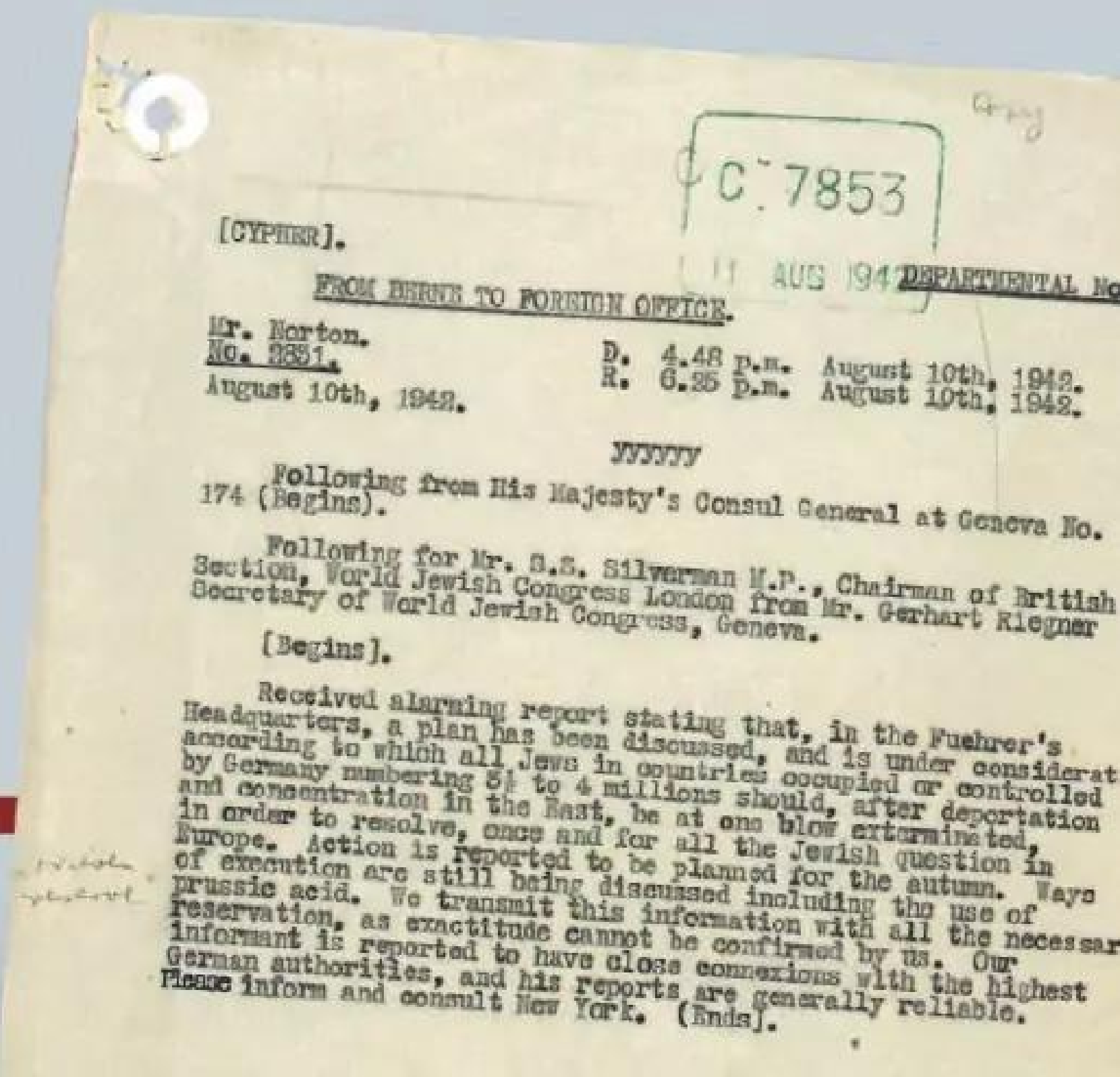
1942

West is warned

August: A telegram sent by Gerhart Riegner, president of the World Jewish Congress organisation, states that the Germans plan to deport and exterminate 3.5-4 million Jews from German-occupied territories. The US State Department describes the matter as "a wild rumour, fuelled by Jewish anxieties".

As early as 1942, the so-called Riegner Telegram warned of the Germans' plans.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES UK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11 AUG 1942 DEPARTMENTAL No

[CYPHER].

FROM BERNE TO FOREIGN OFFICE.

Mr. Norton.
No. 2831.
August 10th, 1942.

D. 4.48 p.m. August 10th, 1942.
R. 6.35 p.m. August 10th, 1942.

YYYYY

Following from His Majesty's Consul General at Geneva No. 174 (Begins).

Following for Mr. S.S. Silverman M.P., Chairman of British Section, World Jewish Congress London from Mr. Gerhart Riegner Secretary of World Jewish Congress, Geneva.

(Begins).

Received alarming report stating that, in the Fuehrer's Headquarters, a plan has been discussed, and is under considerat according to which all Jews in countries occupied or controlled by Germany numbering 3½ to 4 millions should, after deportation and concentration in the East, be at one blow exterminated, in order to resolve, once and for all the Jewish question in Europe. Action is reported to be planned for the autumn. Ways of execution are still being discussed including the use of prussic acid. We transmit this information with all the necessar reservation, as exactitude cannot be confirmed by us. Our informant is reported to have close connexions with the highest German authorities, and his reports are generally reliable. Please inform and consult New York. (Ends).

in Poland, none were prepared for the discoveries that awaited them on the Western Front. Just as Captain Cooper and his comrades had encountered the stench of the camps on their approach to the Dora-Mittelbau concentration camp, the pungent odour was also the first thing that met soldiers who reached other camps in the spring of 1945.

The foul smell came mainly from the many unburied corpses. Prior to their escape, the Germans had simply sprinkled lime over the dead in the hope that it would take away the worst of the odour. But the manoeuvre added a pungent sour smell to the already unbearable stench of rotting meat and unsanitary conditions.

The soldiers temporarily forgot the smells when they came across surviving prisoners. Their condition was so bad that most of them stood like statues and simply watched the soldiers, leaning on each other to keep from falling over. In Bergen-Belsen, liberated by British troops on 15th April 1945, 20-year-old Hédi Fried was one of the many weakened prisoners unable to react to her liberation straight away.

“I was so weakened and apathetic that I could barely feel joy ... I was glad, of course, but cheering requires strength,” she explained after the war.

The Allied soldiers were in shock. In every camp, living skeletons shuffled around among dead fellow prisoners. Bodies were left where they had fallen – against wooden walls, in the barracks, in the latrine pits.

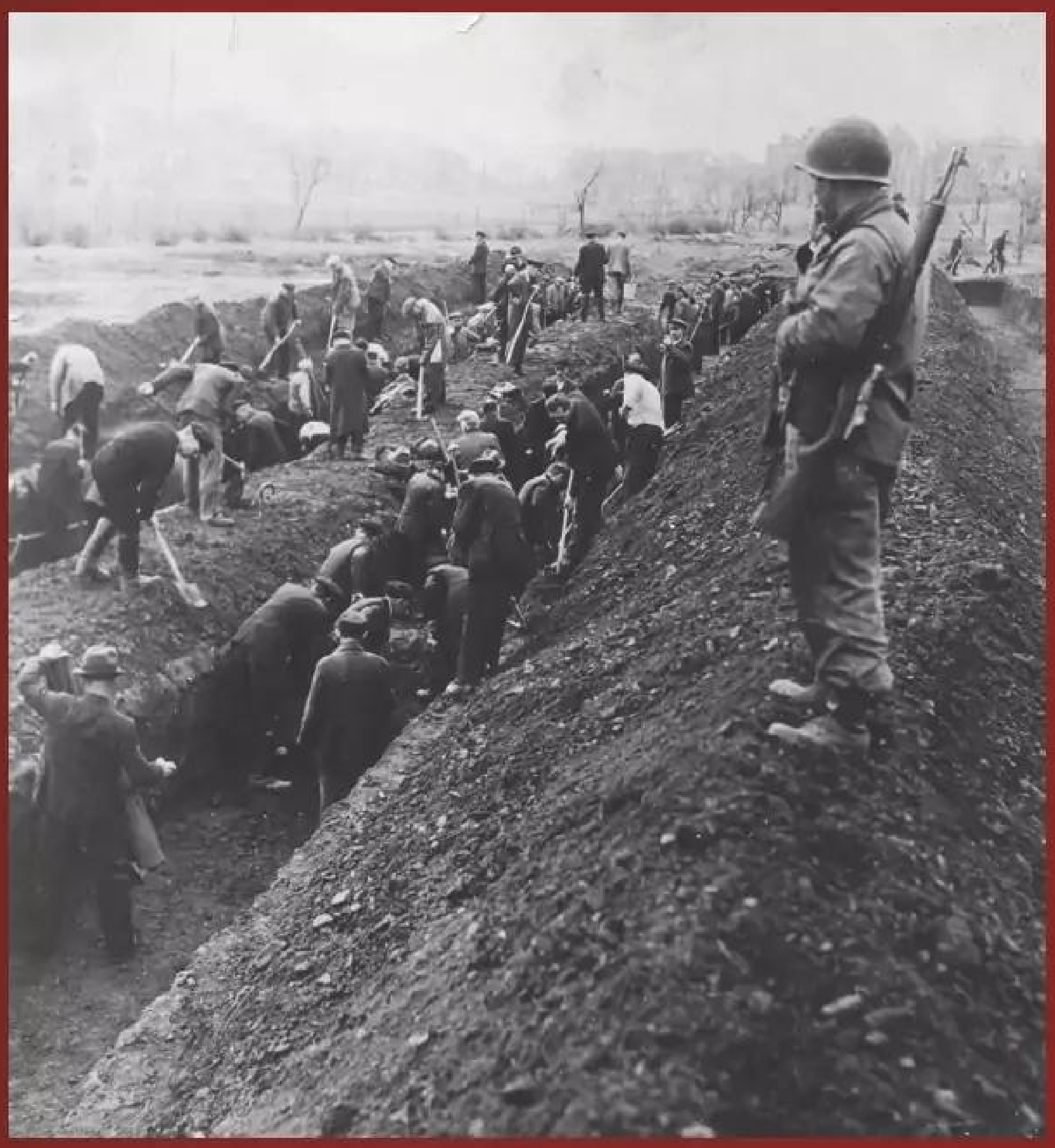
In the camps where the Nazis had hastily murdered prisoners with gunshots to the neck, the victims were often stacked in long rows. In Dora-Mittelbau, that was exactly what Captain Belton Cooper saw: “What appeared to be garbage was piled in three rows about six feet high and 400 feet long. To my abject horror I noticed that parts of the stacks were moving. Suddenly, I realised that these stacks were naked human beings, writhing in their excrement and left in the open to die. The stench was overwhelming.”

Many of the Allied soldiers had been at war for years, but had never witnessed the killing of civilians on such an overwhelming scale. Even hard-boiled high-ranking officers broke down in the concentration

CIVILIANS WERE FORCED TO SEE HORRORS OF CAMPS

After liberation, American soldiers made sure that local Germans witnessed the atrocities that had taken place right under their noses.

Germans living near the liberated concentration camps often explained to the Americans that they thought the camps were just secret factories. But the soldiers found this explanation hard to accept. Whether the German civilians had turned a blind eye on purpose or not, they now had to bear witness to the crimes.



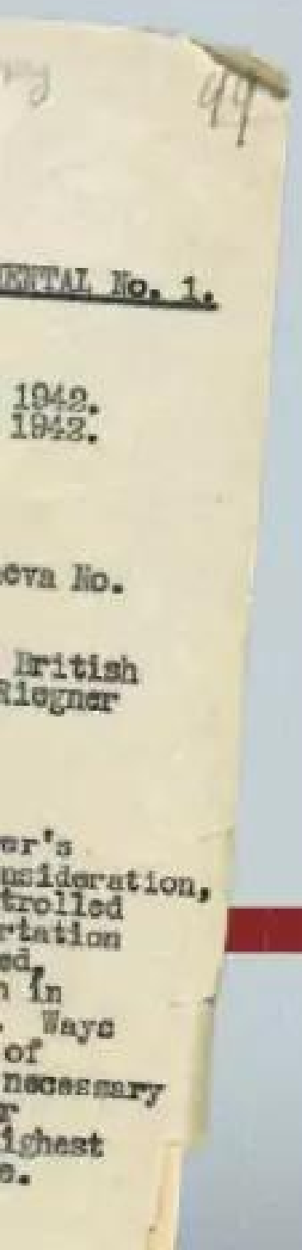
German civilians were forced to dig mass graves for the dead prisoners.

AKG/RITZAU SCANPIX

In almost every US-liberated camp, the Americans picked up local residents in lorries and forced them to see the piles of starved corpses piled on top of each other. Horrified, husbands and wives walked around crying, looking at mass graves, crematoria and emaciated survivors. In Ohrdruf, the mayor, Albert Schneider, was the first to be forced to see the atrocities.

“I did not believe that Germans were capable of atrocities like these. There were rumours in town, but we did not believe these,” Schneider said.

The sight – and certainly the realisation that such barbaric acts had taken place in his district – was too much for the mayor. That same evening, Schneider and his wife committed suicide.



1942
Newspapers write about genocide

December: The Polish government-in-exile publishes a report titled the ‘Mass Extermination of Jews in German-occupied Poland’. The Allies issue a declaration condemning the Nazi policy, which is printed in several major newspapers.

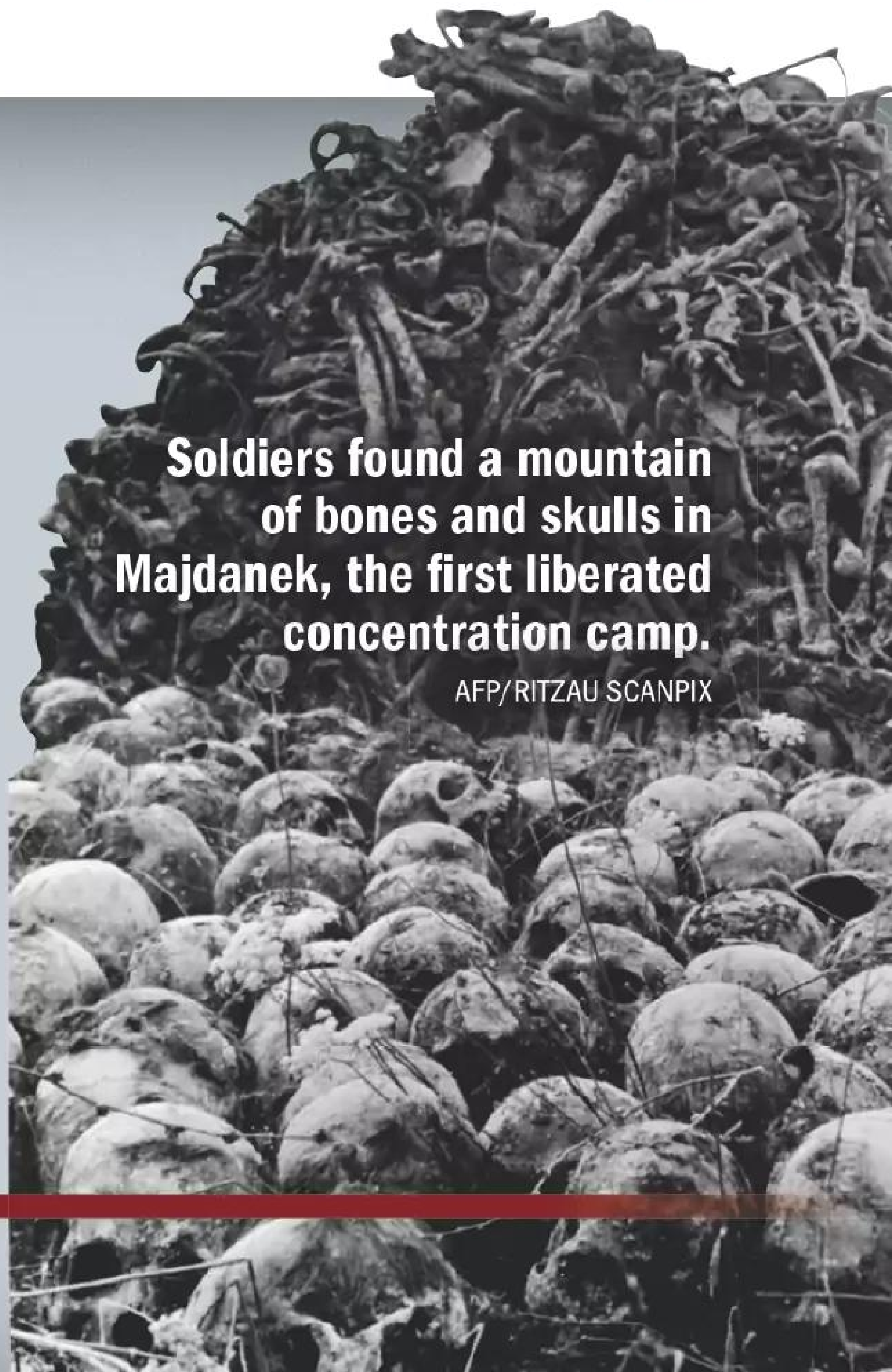
1944
Auschwitz is discovered from air

April: Allied aircraft spot the Auschwitz complex from the air, but Britain and the US choose not to bomb the railway line or the gas chambers, which according to several intelligence reports are in use. After the war, the decision is criticised.

MEPL/RITZAU SCANPIX

1944
First camp is liberated

July: The Red Army liberates the Majdanek concentration camp, unequivocally proving the scale and cruelty of the Nazi extermination policy.

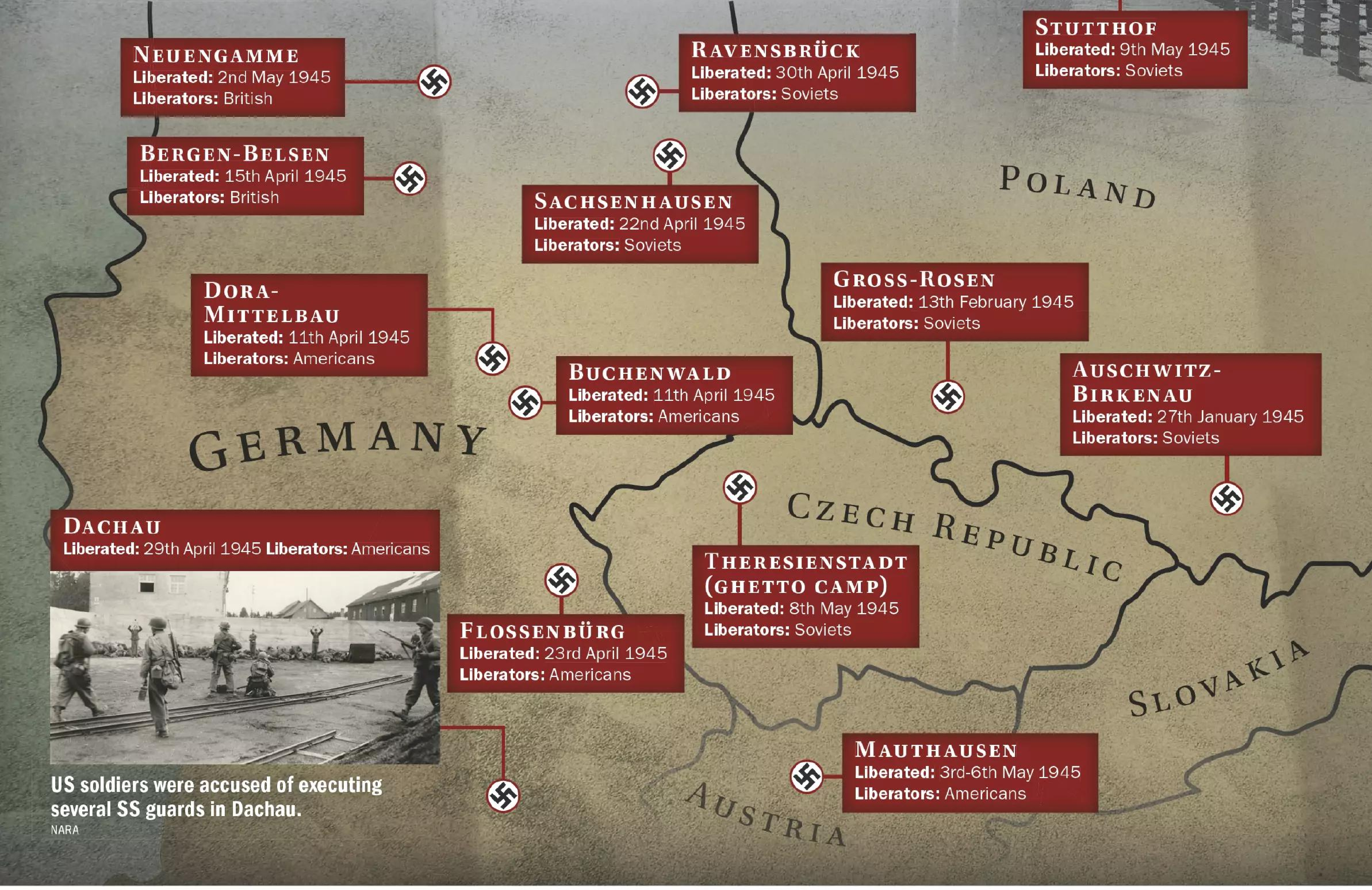


Soldiers found a mountain of bones and skulls in Majdanek, the first liberated concentration camp.

AFP/RITZAU SCANPIX

LIBERATION OF CONCENTRATION CAMPS TOOK 10 MONTHS

The Nazis established 20 main camps and hundreds of subcamps, often near factories where the prisoners worked. The concentration camps were liberated in the final phase of the war, while the four pure extermination camps – Treblinka, Sobibór, Belzec and Chelmno – had been shut down before the Red Army arrived.



NEUENGAMME
Liberated: 2nd May 1945
Liberators: British

BERGEN-BELSEN
Liberated: 15th April 1945
Liberators: British

DORA-MITTELBAU
Liberated: 11th April 1945
Liberators: Americans

RAVENSBRÜCK
Liberated: 30th April 1945
Liberators: Soviets

SACHSENHAUSEN
Liberated: 22nd April 1945
Liberators: Soviets

BUCHENWALD
Liberated: 11th April 1945
Liberators: Americans

STUTTHOF
Liberated: 9th May 1945
Liberators: Soviets

GROSS-ROSEN
Liberated: 13th February 1945
Liberators: Soviets

AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU
Liberated: 27th January 1945
Liberators: Soviets

DACHAU
Liberated: 29th April 1945 **Liberators:** Americans

FLOSSENBÜRG
Liberated: 23rd April 1945
Liberators: Americans

THERESIENSTADT (GHETTO CAMP)
Liberated: 8th May 1945
Liberators: Soviets

MAUTHAUSEN
Liberated: 3rd-6th May 1945
Liberators: Americans

US soldiers were accused of executing several SS guards in Dachau.
NARA

camps. When General George Patton visited Ohrdruf on 12th April, he had to go behind a barrack to vomit. Patton's assistant, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Codman, was also badly affected.

"I have taken a bath, changed my clothes, smoked two packs of cigarettes, but the overpowering moral and physical stench … remains in my nostrils," Codman wrote in his diary.

Prisoners died from eating chocolate

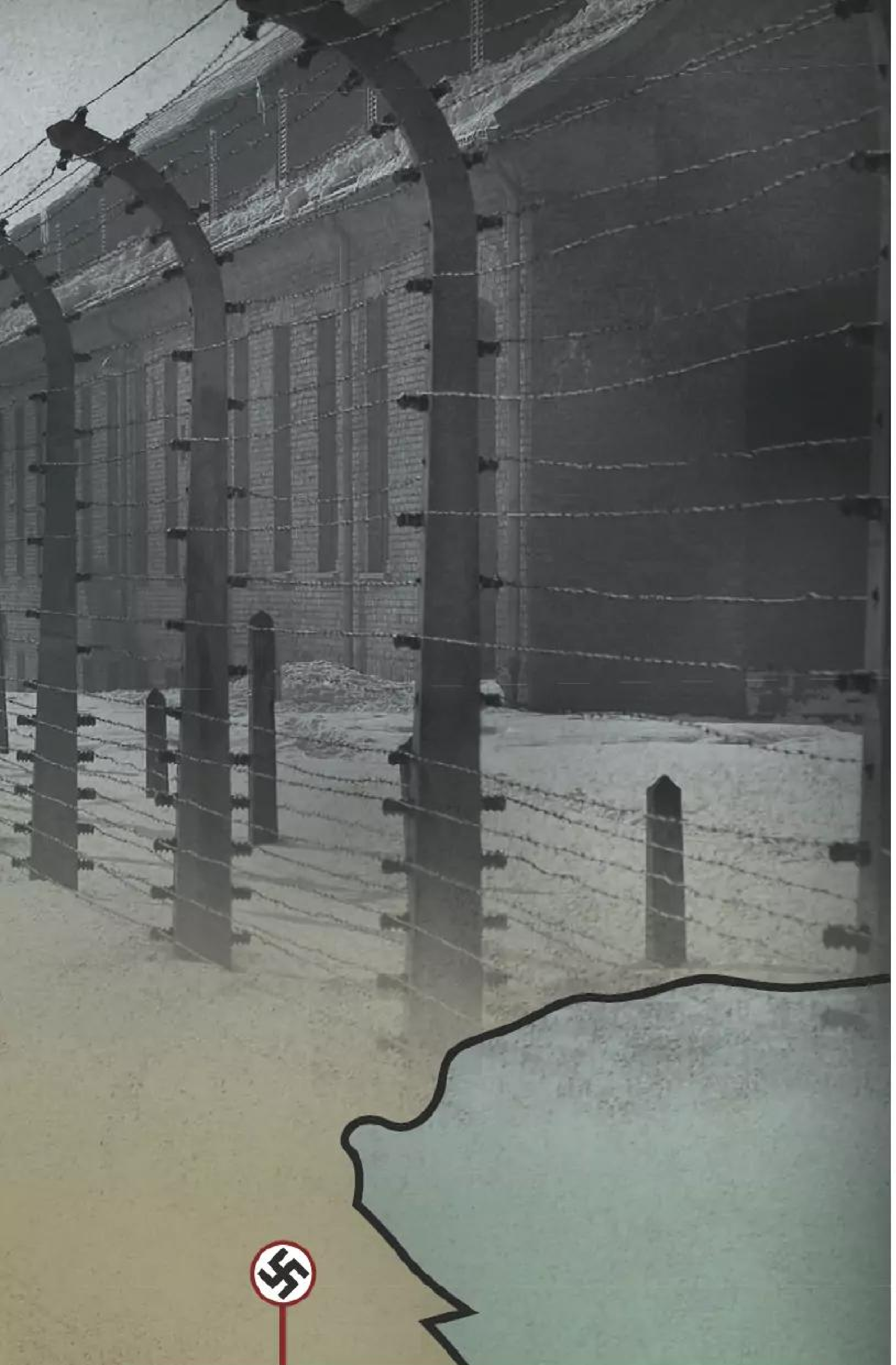
Many exhausted prisoners, like Hédi Fried, received the Allies with no immediate joy because they'd learned not to trust men in uniform. However, when the prisoners discovered that the soldiers had come to free them, they were overcome with relief.

"I cannot describe the joy we felt when we realised that they were American soldiers and that they only wished us well. We had been rescued at last … [A]s we gradually realised this, we began to feel joy," recalled Hungarian Blanche Major, who was liberated from Stadtallendorf, one of Buchenwald's many subcamps.

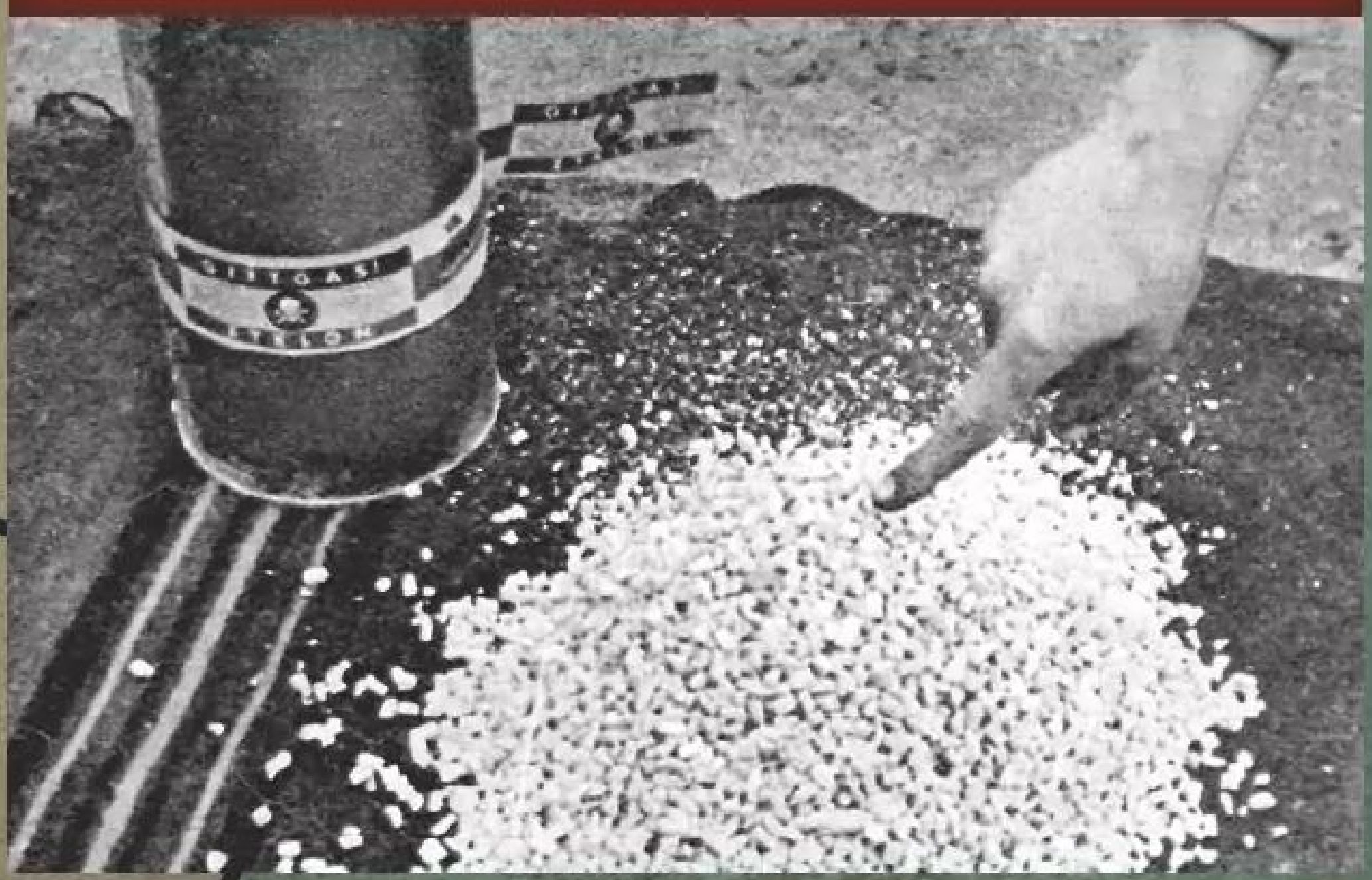
Soon the skeletons stumbled forward to thank their rescuers, their tormented faces momentarily lit up. Sergeant Howard Cwick stood in Buchenwald with tears running down his cheeks when an ex-prisoner approached and wiped away his tears with a bony palm. Cwick explained that he was Jewish like the vast majority of the prisoners at Buchenwald, and soon the soldier was almost surrounded.

"They closed in around me. Arms came out from everywhere – to touch my uniform, my face. Several grabbed my hands – and began kissing them," Cwick later recounted.

The warm welcome – which was repeated in every camp – made an everlasting impression on soldiers and liberated alike, but Cwick was quickly



MAJDANEK
Liberated: 23rd July 1944 **Liberators:** Soviets



The liberation of Majdanek provided concrete evidence of the Nazis' use of the poison gas Zyklon B.

MEPL/RITZAU SCANPIX

WOJTEK PIETRUSIEWICZ/SHUTTERSTOCK

thrown back to the sad reality. The Jewish ex-prisoner, having wiped away the American's tears, turned to a friend who was in such a poor way that he just lay on the ground:

"Nachum, we are free," he said in German, but the friend did not reply. "It's over; we are free," the ex-prisoner tried again as he sat and took his friend's head in his arms. But there was no sound, no smile. The friend was dead.

"You are too late! This is my friend! He couldn't wait for you any more! Why couldn't you have come sooner?" came the despairing voice in English. Cwick couldn't help but feel guilt and sadness, and he was far from the only one with such feelings. Many of the liberators were ashamed on behalf of humanity that the Jews and other Nazi prisoners had been treated so cruelly.

The soldiers wanted to do everything they could to help the distressed and starving prisoners as quickly as possible. Unaware of the consequences, the Americans handed out chocolate bars and other calorific treats to the ex-prisoners, who gobbled them up. Unfortunately, the food from the field rations was like poison to the fragile bodies. After months on a poor diet, the survivors' stomachs couldn't cope with the high-calorie food. At best, the ex-prisoners would pass out shortly after consuming a chocolate bar, but often it cost them their lives.

The soldiers were horrified that the liberated were dying from what they had intended to be a good deed, so the Americans quickly learned to stop handing out items from their field rations. Instead, soup, milk and porridge were put on the menu – but in small quantities.

"They don't understand why we give them so little, but if we don't it all comes up within minutes after it went down because they haven't eaten for so long," one US soldier wrote home to his family.

Field medics fought against all odds

The Allies faced a massive clean-up operation. The liberated camps were littered with rotting corpses, faeces and vomit, and the barracks and ex-prisoners' clothes were germ traps. The emaciated former captives suffered from typhus, chronic diarrhoea and tuberculosis, and with their immune systems at rock bottom, their lives were in danger. They were no longer prisoners, but patients.

The liberators had to clean up the awful unsanitary conditions as quickly as possible, which is why the bodies were collected and then dumped in mass graves. Because there were so many victims, the Allies had no choice but to bury the dead in the same way the Nazis had done. At the Dora-Mittelbau camp, where Captain Cooper was located, bulldozers rolled in to dig huge holes, while German civilians from Nordhausen were forced to work around the clock until all the bodies were buried.

While the mass burials were going on, the soldiers were busy cleaning. The filthy, stinking barracks were carefully disinfected so they could once again house people without risk of infection. The ex-prisoners stripped off their dirty rags, which were burned. Then, once they had been deloused and sprayed with DDT insecticide powder, the emaciated figures pulled on clean pyjamas from the camps' warehouses.

"They were thoroughly sprayed ... over the body, the axilla and pubic area being given special attention," explained the records of the sanitary troops that arrived at Buchenwald four days after its liberation. Buchenwald was the largest concentration camp

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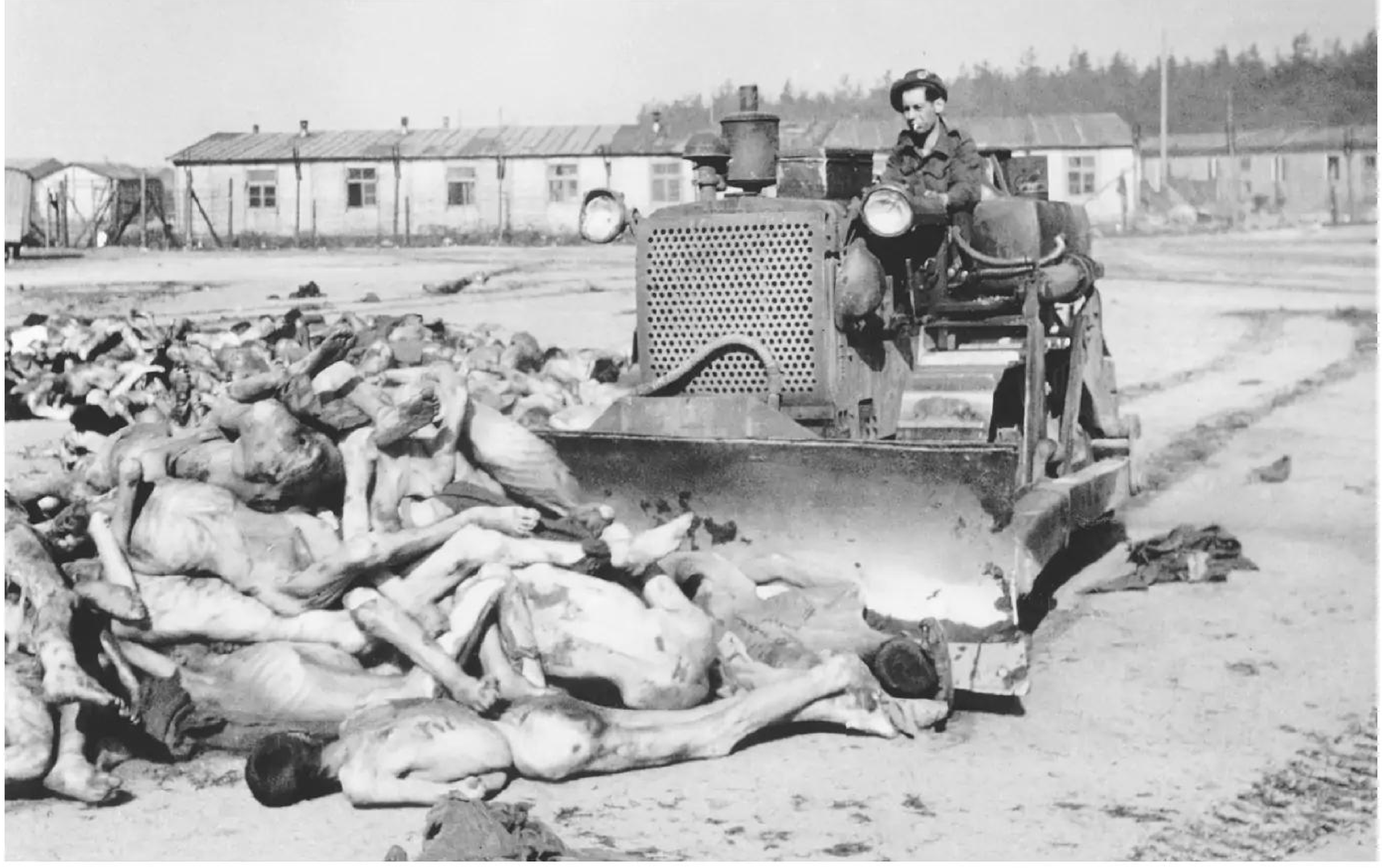

AKG/RITZAU SCANPIX

A British soldier uses a bulldozer to move bodies in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

in Germany, and with 21,000 surviving prisoners – most weighing around 40kg – the medical unit's doctors and nursing staff had their hands full.

The Americans set up a hospital in Buchenwald's former officers' barracks, where doctors could operate on and treat patients. Other camp buildings and barracks were used as wards, where the most severely injured patients could recover on canvas beds arranged in rows.

Although patients had their wounds treated, received penicillin and were given blood donated by US soldiers, survival was not guaranteed.

"[T]he sick were still dying. ... [Y]ou couldn't save them! We felt terrible! They were dying under our eyes," a military doctor recalled after the war.

Freedom brought new problems

When the Red Cross also started delivering supplies to the liberated camps in Germany from the end of April, the care and especially the food situation improved. Eggs and nutritious fresh vegetables did the liberated people good. During May, the war finally eased its grip on Europe and the emaciated ex-prisoners were soon well enough to walk out the gates and leave behind the hell they had endured. But while political prisoners usually had a home and family to go back to, Jews often found it harder to return to their lives.

"We had lost our families, our homes. We had no place to go, nobody to hug. Nobody was waiting for us anywhere. We had been liberated from the fear of death, but we were not free from the fear of life," wrote the Polish-French Jew Hadassah Rosensaft, who was liberated from Bergen-Belsen.

Eastern European Jews were under particular pressure. Many feared returning to homelands under Soviet influence – in fact, Jews were unwanted there. Those Eastern European Jews who tried to return home often found themselves persecuted by the locals. In Poland, for instance, 42 returning Jews were even murdered by Polish militias in the city of Kielce in 1946, when Jews were wrongly accused of being behind the temporary disappearance of a local boy.

Even 19-year-old Blanche Major, who had been liberated from Stadtallendorf, found it difficult to return to Hungary,

MOGENS RUD/RITZAU SCANPIX

The white buses were driven by volunteer drivers, but also had Red Cross staff on board.

WHITE BUSES TOOK 20,000 PRISONERS TO SAFETY

In the final phase of the war, Scandinavian forces fought to rescue Danish and Norwegian concentration camp prisoners; 20,000 were taken to Sweden in white buses.

In early 1944, determined Danes and Norwegians began planning how to rescue their compatriots from German concentration camps. However, it wasn't until Sweden got involved in 1945 that the plans came to fruition. After intense negotiations with the powerful SS leadership, it became possible to gather Danish and Norwegian prisoners in the Neuengamme concentration camp under the protection of the Swedish Red Cross. From there, the prisoners would be transported to neutral Sweden in white buses. One of the volunteer drivers would later recount the nightmare journey home.

"Due to the prisoners' dysentery, frequent long rests had to be taken. Many were so exhausted that the Swedish soldiers had to hold them while they performed their necessities, and others collapsed in their own excrement," said the driver, who witnessed many ex-prisoners "succumbing despite the large number of doctors and nurses".

However, the trip was also heartening. All over Denmark, people gathered in the streets to welcome the buses with cheers and flags. Schoolchildren passed flowers with messages attached through the bus windows to the liberated prisoners.

"It's impossible to describe what we felt during the heartfelt reception ... Sitting with the flower in my hand brought tears to my eyes, and several of my comrades felt the same way. I can't believe grown men cry, but it was so nice – we felt at home," said one liberated Norwegian.

Over 20,000 men and women were taken to Scandinavia on the white buses in the spring of 1945. About half of them were Danes and Norwegians, while the other half consisted of sick, non-Scandinavian women and children who were allowed to travel from Ravensbrück women's camp.

USHMM

Bernadotte met with Himmler

The repatriation of prisoners gained momentum when Folke Bernadotte became involved in the case. The Swedish count, who was vice president of the Swedish Red Cross, travelled to Berlin in February 1945, where he negotiated a deal with SS commander Heinrich Himmler, the head of the entire German concentration camp system. Due to the count's efforts, the white bus rescue is also known today as the Bernadotte operation.

Folke Bernadotte was assassinated by a paramilitary group in Jerusalem in 1948.

which had sided with the Axis during the war.

"The war had stolen our youth, and now we discovered that there was no room for us in Hungary either. We were not particularly welcome, and we soon realised that it would not be easy to live on in the country which had collaborated with the Nazis," said the Hungarian woman, who decided to return to Germany with her husband.

Jews ended up in refugee camps

Many liberated Jews shared the same fate as the Majors. Unable to live in peace in their homeland, the Allies set up so-called DP camps for displaced persons, or refugees. The camps were established shortly after the end of the war and by the end of 1946, housed close to 200,000 people.

"There has been little improvement in the situation since the day of liberation for the Jewish displaced persons," wrote Jewish commentator Zorach Warhaftig, referring to the fact that the prospect of an ordinary life in freedom, which had been the Jews' hope in spring 1945, was now fading.

The DP camps provided protection for Jews and others who had become homeless after the Holocaust, but the liberated concentration camp prisoners now found themselves back in barracks and tents. They weren't surrounded by armed guards forcing them to work all day long, but clothing and food was still limited due to the scarcity of supplies after the war. In many places, ex-prisoners were even forced to walk around in their former prison suits or German soldier uniforms.

Over time, food supplies improved and the relief workers made a great effort to restore the children's faith in human beings by always calling them by their name and giving them positive attention – behaviour that many had not experienced for years during the concentration camp era. The DP camps became more and more like small communities, with libraries, schools and theatres. Education and culture helped to take their minds off family members they'd lost. But the DP camps were no real home, and the stateless Jews lacked certainty about their future.

> **"When I looked behind me, there were no SS soldiers, I heard no dogs barking, and all I saw were peaceful Swedish families on tandem bikes"**
>
> HÉDI FRIED, ROMANIAN JEW

It wasn't until the late 1940s that the situation improved for those Jews who had not yet found anywhere to restart their lives. In 1948, the Jewish state of Israel was proclaimed and the country soon became a refuge for a large number of Jews – including people who weren't from DP camps. Entry restrictions were also lifted in many other countries, allowing more Jews to emigrate. Over 80,000 travelled to the USA, while the Majors were given the opportunity to move to Norway.

Rejoicing in life again

Hédi Fried, who was liberated from Bergen-Belsen, also ended up in Scandinavia – and it wasn't until she arrived in Sweden with her sister Livi that the Romanian-born Hédi realised she could finally "feel jubilant" as the sisters walked through Stockholm:

"When I looked behind me, there were no SS soldiers, I heard no dogs barking, and all I saw were peaceful Swedish families on tandem bikes enjoying their Sunday in the sunshine. Livi and I were thinking the same thing. We looked at each other and started dancing in the middle of the bridge."

After years of inhumane imprisonment, the liberated Jews could finally resume their lives. ■

Many liberated prisoners ended up in the DP camps – this is a football team from the DP camp in Berlin.

SCHWARTZBERG FAMILY ARCHIVE

Top Nazis on trial:

GÖRING ENJOYED THE LIMELIGHT

In November 1945, 22 members of the Nazi hierarchy went on trial in Nuremberg. Among them was Hitler's planned successor, Herman Göring, the vain senior Nazi who was scared of thunderstorms and had millions of lives on his conscience. In Nuremberg, he stunned the world one last time.

By Else Christensen

Hermann Göring's Mercedes Benz glided majestically through the Austrian Alps. Behind the bulletproof windows sat the Reichsmarschall, dressed in a silver-grey uniform and bearing his medals, the Grand Cross of the Iron Cross and Pour le Mérite, Germany's highest honours. Behind him followed a trail of Luftwaffe lorries.

The date was 7th May 1945. Germany had been bombed to pieces, the population was starving, Hitler had committed suicide, and the Nazi regime had collapsed. But Göring, Hitler's right-hand man, still believed he had an important role to play. Recognising Germany's inevitable defeat, he had contacted General Dwight D Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, to negotiate the end of the war. Now he headed off to the Fischhorn Castle at Zell am See, convinced that he was going to speak with the general.

Göring never met Eisenhower. Instead, his motorcade was stopped by US Brigadier General Robert I Stack and his soldiers from the 36th Infantry Division. With a measured salute, he waved Göring out of the car.

Stack's adjutant answered the question in the eyes of the young German soldiers as Göring was led over to the US convoy. "Your Reichsmarschall is kaput," he said.

The following days were confusing for Göring. In his mind, he was still Reichsmarschall, head of the Luftwaffe, and the Führer's trusted man. He even experienced a rush of past glory and fame when Stack

In the judgement against Herman Göring, the judges said: "His guilt is unique in its enormity." Göring was, among other things, the mastermind behind the Gestapo and the plan for the persecution of Jews and other so-called inferior peoples.

POLFOTO/CORBIS, GETTY IMAGES

allowed him to hold a press conference and – still wearing his uniform – give his take on the course of the war and Germany's future.

It was only when Hermann Göring was sent to prison in a former spa hotel in Bad Mondorf in Luxembourg on 20th May that he realised the true gravity of the situation. Seeing the hotel, stripped of its original opulence in favour of simple cells furnished with straw mattresses, robbed him of any illusion that he was still important. Like the other senior Nazis incarcerated there while the Allies prepared for their trial, he was now simply a common war criminal. And in less than 18 months, he would meet his end.

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

The state-organised mass murder of Jews and other population groups was defined as a crime so cruel that it violated not only the victims, but all of humanity.

Göring wanted to secure his legacy

Immediately after his capture, Göring's luggage – 16 monogrammed suitcases, a red hat box and a large collection of rings, watches and cufflinks – was taken from him. In his toiletry bag, Göring's guards found a large number of codeine tablets. The pills were a milder substitute for the morphine that Göring had become addicted to due to pain from a gunshot wound he'd

POLFOTO/ ULLSTEIN BILD

Göring liked to stay at his hunting lodge, which he decorated with numerous art treasures stolen from occupied countries and Nazi victims.

received during the Nazis' failed Beer Hall Putsch in 1923.

The pills were confiscated and the former Reichsmarschall had to go cold turkey. The withdrawal of the medication and a creeping realisation that the game was lost made Göring panic. One night, during a thunderstorm, he had a heart attack. "I was all by myself. When the storm came up it worried me," whimpered the former Reichsmarschall.

However, rehab, exercise in the prison yard, and a restrictive diet did Göring good. When he was captured, he was severely overweight, weighing 104 kg at just 170 cm. According to the US military doctor who examined him, he was "extremely obese, flaccid, and generally in very poor physical condition". Now the kilos were falling off. After two months, his grey uniform trousers had to be taken in by 15 centimetres, and when Göring arrived on a US transport plane in Nuremberg for the trial on 12th August, he was a new man.

A simple plan

Psychologically, too, there had been a change. In the final days of the war, Göring had been depressed and resigned. He was weighed down by the course of the war and the destruction of the air force he had built from scratch. He had soothed his disappointments with pills and increasingly flashy uniforms. Now that all this had been taken from him, his eyes had a new clarity. The lawyer Airey Neave, who was dealing with Göring in the run-up to the trial, saw the change as soon as he arrived at Göring's cell on 19th October to deliver the indictment.

He was greeted with a smile and a bow, and Göring was seemingly unconcerned, even though he had been charged with four counts: crimes against peace, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and conspiracy to commit crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity. He acknowledged

After the end of the war, the Allies confiscated huge amounts of stolen art from Göring.

POLFOTO/ULLSTEIN BILD

HITLER'S HEIR FELL FROM FAVOUR

Hermann Göring was Hitler's unscrupulous and loyal supporter from the early days of the Nazi Party. Yet the Reichsmarschall ended up falling out of favour.

As a World War I airman, Göring found it difficult to adapt to civilian life, and when he met Hitler in 1922, he joined the then insignificant Nazi Party. He also took part in the failed Munich Beer Hall Putsch of 1923 and secured a place among the men Hitler fondly referred to as the "old fighters".

When Hitler came to power, he could always count on Göring's support. He founded the Gestapo secret police and was head of the Luftwaffe and the driving force behind the building of the German war machine. From 1938, he was Hitler's deputy and heir to his leadership.

As the bombs rained down on the Führer's bunker in Berlin, Göring travelled to southern Germany to negotiate peace – and safe passage – with the Allies. Hearing about the situation in Berlin, where Hitler was trapped and would most likely die, he inquired in a telegram whether he should take power. This would have been in accordance with a 1941 edict. But Göring's arch-enemy, Hitler's private secretary Martin Bormann, presented the telegram as a betrayal of Hitler. A few days later, the Führer issued a shoot-to-kill order against the traitorous Göring. However, it was never executed.

Göring with his wife Emmy and daughter Edda, who was possibly named after Mussolini's daughter.

POLFOTO/ULLSTEIN BILD

them with a terse *"Jawohl"*. "He was ready to fight," Neave later wrote.

The explanation for Göring's lack of concern was simple, he confided to US prison psychiatrist Douglas M Kelley. He had a plan. After the Beer Hall Putsch, the Nazi Party had been banned, but Hitler and his men had kept going and eventually won the Germans over to their cause. Göring planned to do the same.

"If I cannot convince the court, I shall at least convince the German people that all I did was done for the Greater German Reich. In 50 or 60 years there will be statues of Hermann Göring all over Germany," he confided to the psychiatrist.

Court was set

Memorials, however, were not what the Allies had in mind when the doors opened on the morning of 20th November 1945 to a packed courtroom in the Nuremberg courthouse. With looks of contempt and curiosity, everyone craned their necks as the 22 defendants – Nazi leaders such as Göring, foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Hitler's former deputy Rudolf Hess – entered and made their way to the defendants' benches. This was the moment the Allies had been waiting for. Now they would show how civilised victors treated the leaders of a totalitarian and vile regime. At Nuremberg, a new era would be founded; an era without summary executions, gas chambers and genocide.

The Allied prosecutors were well prepared. As the Red Army had begun the final assault on Berlin, orders had gone out from the German government that all documents had to be destroyed. Nothing was to fall into enemy hands.

PARTICIPATION IN A CRIMINAL CONSPIRACY

A law that meant that members of an organisation that committed crimes to achieve its goal, such as the Nazi Party, could be convicted of those crimes even if they hadn't committed them themselves.

However, few archivists actually followed this order and chose to act as they always had done; they looked after the records. As a result, many documents remained in situ or were hastily hidden away. A large collection of microfilm from the foreign office was found in the Thuringian Forest buried in a metal box, wrapped in an old raincoat. The result was tonnes of documents, many of them full of confidential information from the regime's inner circle.

US prosecutor Robert H Jackson made extensive use of the German documents as he detailed the Nazi atrocities over the following days. This didn't bother Göring – he didn't bat an eyelid. "The victor will always be the judge and the vanquished the accused," he wrote on the indictment listing his sins: complicity in the persecution of the Jews, exploitation of the occupied territories, and the looting of millions in valuables and art treasures that ended up in Göring's private home.

Göring unaffected by mass murder

When the prosecutor finished, Göring declared himself not guilty "in the sense of the indictment". He had prepared a long speech in which he would explain that he recognised what he had done, that everything had been done for the good of the German people, and that he did not consider himself a criminal. The presiding judge forbade him from giving the speech.

Over the following days, events continued to go against Göring. A memo showing that Hitler had openly calculated that several million Soviets would die of starvation as a result of Germany's invasion in June 1941

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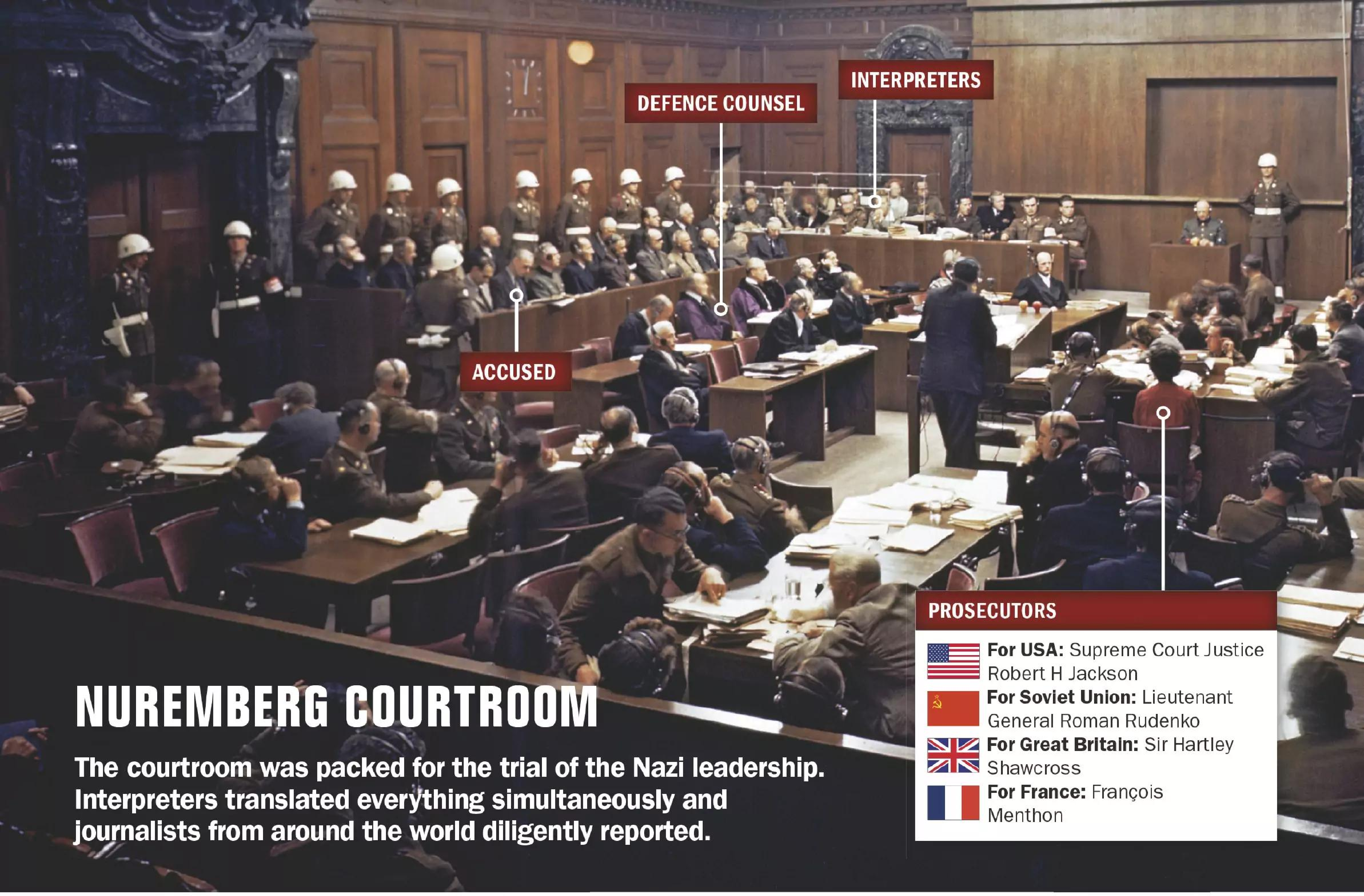


NUREMBERG COURTROOM

The courtroom was packed for the trial of the Nazi leadership. Interpreters translated everything simultaneously and journalists from around the world diligently reported.

PROSECUTORS

For USA: Supreme Court Justice Robert H Jackson
For Soviet Union: Lieutenant General Roman Rudenko
For Great Britain: Sir Hartley Shawcross
For France: François Menthon

caused outright consternation among the defendants. "Concentrated political madness," exclaimed former Hitler Youth leader Baldur Von Schirach, while another defendant stated that he would never have supported Hitler had he known of these statements.

Indignant, Göring turned to his former comrades in arms. "What about the grabbing of California and Texas by the Americans? That was plain aggressive warfare," he raged, in a thinly veiled criticism directed at the US chief prosecutor.

Things went horribly wrong in the afternoon when the prosecutors showed a film shot by the Allies during the liberation of the concentration camps. No one who saw the film would ever forget it.

"[An] endless river of pale bodies flowing across the screen, bodies with ribs sticking out through the chests … [B]odies pushed like dirt by giant bulldozers. And bodies that are not bodies at all but charred bits of bone and flesh," an onlooker later recounted. The accused were clearly affected – several covered their faces in horror and shame, and General Wilhelm Keitel, commander-in-chief of Nazi Germany's armed forces, frantically wiped his eyes with a handkerchief at his place in the dock.

Only Göring remained unaffected, despite the fact that he had set up several of the camps that had later become concentration camps. Although the camps were not originally extermination camps, violence and cruelty were built into the system from the start, and the mortality rate among prisoners was sky-high. The Gestapo, which provided a steady stream of prisoners to the camps, was also Göring's doing. Yet it was only when he occasionally rubbed his hands as if to dry the sweat that his behaviour signalled a shared responsibility for the nightmare flickering by on the screen.

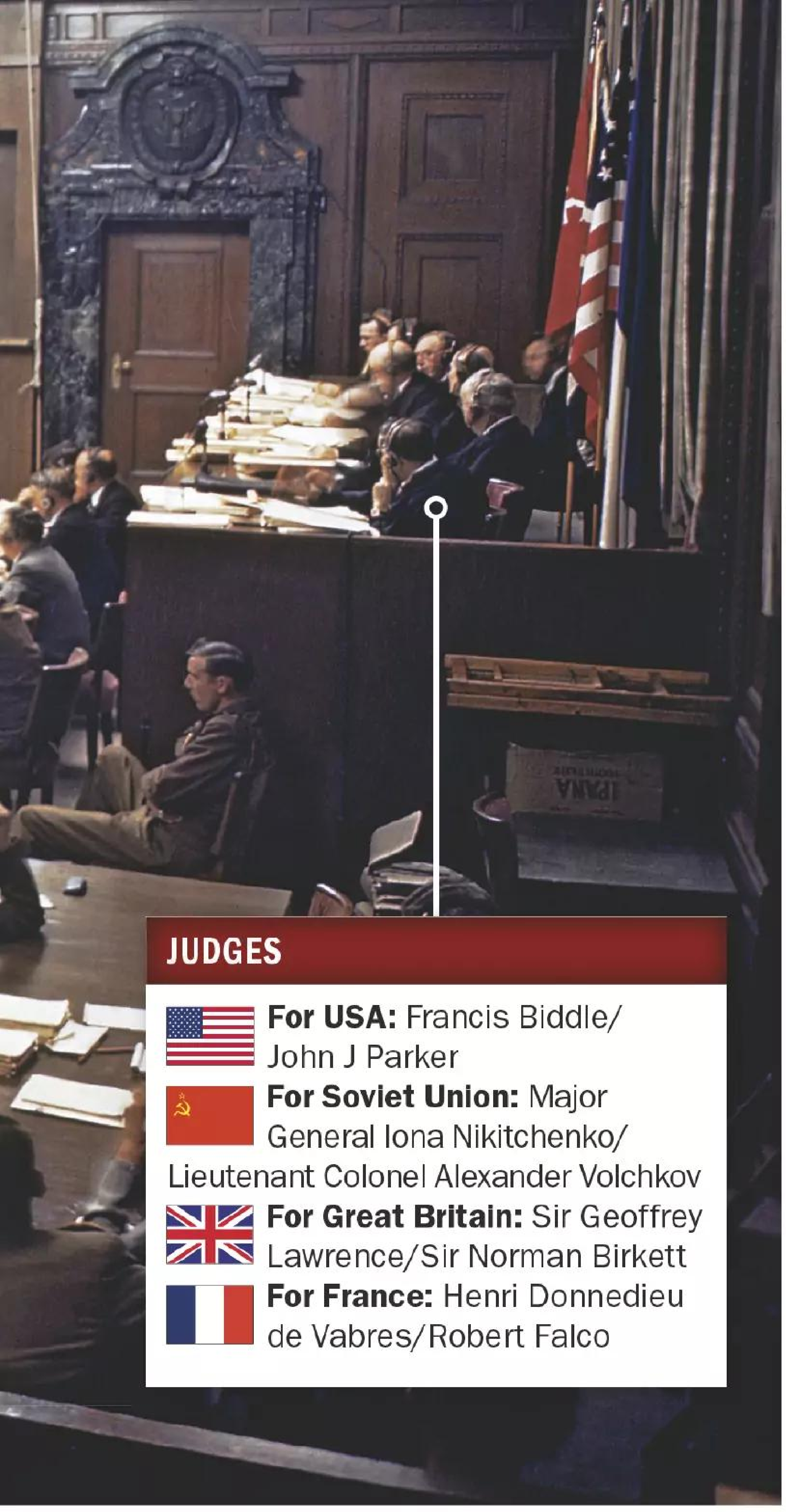
CRIMES AGAINST PEACE

International treaties have set rules for warfare. The Nazis' aggression, such as the attack on Poland, violated them.

Göring held court in canteen

When the film was over, everyone in the courtroom was horrified. The presiding judge couldn't even compose himself to formally adjourn the court. In the silence, a US soldier muttered, "God, this makes me feel like killing the first German I meet." Then Rudolf Hess's voice cut through. "I don't believe it," he proclaimed, loud and clear. Göring told him to shut up, and Hess stayed silent.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, one high-ranking Nazi after another came forward. In an attempt to save their own necks, they now attacked the men and ideals to which they had until recently bowed down. Göring fumed. When SS General Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, one of the most hard-boiled officers on the Eastern Front, took to the stand, Göring could no longer contain his rage. Bach-Zelewski had been granted immunity from prosecution for testifying against his former superiors, and claimed in the dock that he'd only stayed in his post to prevent another,



JUDGES

For USA: Francis Biddle/ John J Parker

For Soviet Union: Major General Iona Nikitchenko/ Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Volchkov

For Great Britain: Sir Geoffrey Lawrence/Sir Norman Birkett

For France: Henri Donnedieu de Vabres/Robert Falco

more brutal man from taking his place, and that the atrocities were "a logical consequence of our ideology".

Göring exploded. "Dirty dog! Damned traitor," he roared, spit flying from his mouth. The outburst cost him a week's tobacco ration, but that didn't make him keep his opinions to himself.

Göring couldn't influence his fellow prisoners in private as the accused were kept separately. In the prison, attached to the Palace of Justice, they lived in solitary cells with stone floors, a chair, table and bed. Through a peephole in the door, a guard kept a constant eye on the prisoners' every movement, and at night a bright light flooded the cell. Meals were served through a hatch, and when prisoners needed to use the toilet, it was in a corner of the cell – the only place not visible from the peephole.

Only in the courthouse's canteen could the accused speak freely, and this was where Göring attempted to get the others to act as heroically as he did. It was not an easy task, as everyone could see which way the wind was blowing, but Göring alternately threatened, cajoled and conjured up images of heroes dying for what they believed in. And he promised protection for those who were scared.

He reassured his frightened fellow prisoners that he would say they acted on his orders. For those who had given up, he tried to raise their mood by imagining their martyrdom. One day the German people would dig up their remains and rebury them in a marble sarcophagus, he assured them.

The prosecution viewed Göring's power over his co-defendants with concern. Several of the Nazis had agreed to cooperate when they'd arrived at Nuremberg. For example, Baldur von Schirach had been ready to issue a written condemnation of Hitler's betrayal of German youth. Under Göring's influence, however, he and others had begun to regain their fanaticism of the past.

Only armaments minister Albert Speer still seemed to want to distance himself from Hitler and his regime. When, on 3rd January 1946, he announced through his lawyer that he had at one point tried to assassinate Hitler for reasons of conscience, his accusers felt they were on the verge of a breakthrough. Göring could not be allowed to thwart this. After a rant against Speer, in which he proclaimed that he "nearly died with shame to think that Germans will be so rotten to prolong this filthy life", Göring was moved. From then on, the former Reichsmarschall had to eat lunch alone.

Prosecutor lost his composure

Everyone held their breath as Göring took the witness stand on the afternoon of 13th March, wearing long boots and trousers that hung off him. Those in the courtroom were almost trembling with anticipation.

Not flinching, Göring acknowledged his past and his responsibilities, including the laws against the Jews:

"I issued them and consequently am responsible, and do not propose to hide in any way behind the Führer's order," he stated. "I was responsible for the rearmament, the training and the morale of the Luftwaffe. It was not the Führer so much as I myself who set the pace and … brought everything to its final development."

Göring defended his co-accused, but not always in a way that put them in the best light. For example, he claimed that foreign minister Ribbentrop was not important enough to have had a say in foreign policy. Göring alone had full access to Hitler, with whom he also – he claimed – met privately. "At best, only

»

GETTY IMAGES

RAZE GERMANY TO THE GROUND!

After the war, Germany was in ruins and its people were starving. But Germany had proven before that it could rise quickly from the ashes, prompting US Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau to come up with a plan in 1944 to ensure that Germany would never again be able to start a world war.

All German industry was to be destroyed and the country was to be transformed into an agricultural society. Major war criminals would be executed without trial, while lesser criminals would be sent back to the countries where they had committed their crime as convict labour. However, the plan was seized upon by the German propaganda ministry, prompting Germans to fight harder. The Allies abandoned it in favour of rebuilding Germany and holding a war crimes tribunal.

Germany almost become an agricultural society.

THE ACCUSED

The 22 top Nazis in the first Nuremberg trial were accused of four offences. The majority of the accused were sentenced to death by hanging – a form of execution Göring considered inappropriate for a soldier.

Death

WILHELM KEITEL

Head of the Wehrmacht High Command. Behind the killing of prisoners of war. **Found guilty** on all four counts.

JOACHIM VON RIBBENTROP

Minister of foreign affairs 1939-45. Involved in deporting Jews to concentration camps and killing prisoners of war. **Found guilty** on all four counts.

HANS FRANK

Minister of justice from 1933 and governor general of Poland 1939-1944. **Found guilty** of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

ERNST KALTENBRUNNER

Head of the Reich security service, the SS and the administration of the concentration camps, among other things. **Found guilty** of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

ALFRED ROSENBERG

Nazi in-house philosopher and man behind theories of superiority of Germanic race. Minister for Occupied Eastern Territories from 1941. **Found guilty** on all four counts.

WILHELM FRICK

Minister of the Interior 1933-1943, then Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. **Found guilty** of crimes against peace, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

ALFRED JODL

Head of the operations staff of the Defence Command. Accused of deportations of Jews and executions of prisoners of war, among other offences. **Found guilty** on all four counts.

JULIUS STREICHER

Editor of the strongly anti-Jewish weekly *Der Stürmer* in the 1930s and helped to foment hatred against the Jews. **Found guilty** of crimes against humanity.

FRITZ SAUCKEL

General plenipotentiary for labour mobilisation (including the organisation of forced labour) 1942-1945. **Found guilty** of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

HERMANN GÖRING

Head of the Luftwaffe, chief organiser of slave labour and the persecution of Jews, Hitler's deputy from 1938 to April 1945. **Found guilty** on all four counts.

MARTIN BORMANN

Leader of the Nazi Party Chancellery from 1941. Convicted in absentia. His bones were found in 1972. **Found guilty** of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

ARTHUR SEYSS-INQUART

Deputy governor and Reichskommissar in occupied Poland and the Netherlands. **Found guilty** of crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

Prison

WALTHER FUNK

Minister of economics 1937-1945. Göring characterised him as an "insignificant subordinate". **Found guilty** of crimes against peace, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Received a life sentence.

ALBERT SPEER

Minister of armaments from 1942, Hitler's architect. **Found guilty** of war crimes and crimes against humanity. 20 years.

BALDUR VON SCHIRACH

Leader of the Hitler Youth 1933-1940. **Found guilty** of crimes against humanity. Received 20 years.

KONSTANTIN VON NEURATH

Foreign minister 1932-1938 and Protector of Bohemia and Moravia 1939-1941, where he was responsible for summary executions. Considered small fry. **Found guilty** on all four counts. Received 17 years.

KARL DÖNITZ

Chief of the German U-boat fleet 1935-43, then commander-in-chief of the fleet. Succeeded Hitler as chancellor 30th April 1945-23rd May 1945. **Found guilty** of crimes against peace and war crimes. Served ten years.

RUDOLF HESS

Reich minister without portfolio, until 1941 second-in-command of the Nazi Party. **Found guilty** of conspiracy and offences against peace. Received a life sentence.

ERICH RAEDER

Commander-in-chief of the German Navy 1935-1943. **Found guilty** of conspiracy, war crimes, crimes against peace. Received a life sentence.

Acquitted

FRANZ VON PAPEN

German chancellor 1932, vice chancellor under Hitler 1933-34.

HANS FRITZSCHE

Head of domestic press department of the Ministry of Propaganda 1938-1942, head of the radio department 1942-1945. Many wondered what he was doing in the dock.

HJALMAR SCHACHT

Minister of Economics, 1934-1937.

Other

ROBERT LEY

Leader of the Nazi trade union movement from 1933. Was indicted, but committed suicide before the trial started.

GUSTAV KRUPP VON BOHLEN UND HALBACH

CEO of the arms manufacturer Krupp. The charges were dismissed because Krupp was senile and the company was run by his son for most of the war.

DEFENCE COUNSEL MARTIN HORN
HERMANN GÖRING
JOACHIM VON RIBBENTROP
DEFENCE COUNSEL OTTO NELTE

Göring and former foreign minister Ribbentrop talk with some of the defence lawyers during a break in negotiations.

POLFOTO/ULLSTEIN BILD

the Führer and I could have conspired," he replied to the prosecution's claim that the whole regime had conspired.

For 12 hours, Göring spoke without interruption. His fellow defendants were buoyed up and hailed Göring as though he were a schoolboy who had just talked his whole class out of a well-deserved detention, and old divisions were forgotten. Even Speer described Göring's defence as moving.

Prosecutor Jackson was worried by the unprecedented amount of time the court had given Göring. In the cross-examination that followed, he went for the Reichsmarschall's jugular. But Göring fended him off. Relaxed, leaning forwards with one hand on his knee, he parried all of Jackson's attacks.

Time and time again, he corrected the US prosecutor, who was clearly out of his depth. Jackson mistranslated important words, got locations wrong and referred to meetings that never happened. Finally, he waved his papers and sneered that at least they proved that Germany's plan "had to be kept entirely secret from foreign powers". But that in itself was not criminal, a fact Göring was quick to point out.

"I do not believe that I can recall the publication of the preparations of the US for mobilisation," he noted coolly.

Jackson had had enough. He turned to the judges and launched into a tirade against Göring's "arrogant and contemptuous attitude toward the Tribunal which is giving him the trial which he never gave a living soul".

Jackson grew so loud and incoherent that the judge came to his rescue and declared the court adjourned.

Later cross-examination failed to cause Göring to lose his composure either. He skilfully steered through every question. When he finished, he was extremely pleased with himself.

"Don't forget I had the best legal brains of Britain, America, Russia and France arrayed against me. And there I was – alone!" he said after interrogation. The public agreed, with *The Times* saying that if Göring had been judged only on his ability to argue, he would have left the witness stand a much greater man than when he entered it.

Stealing the scene even in death

Unfortunately for Göring, it was not words but deeds for which he was being held accountable. And the judges were in no doubt when they handed down their verdict on 1st October. Göring was as guilty as anyone could be. He was "almost always the moving force, second only to his leader. He was the leading war aggressor, both as political and as military leader; he was the director of the slave labour programme and the creator of the oppressive programme against the Jews and other races, at home and abroad ... The record discloses no excuses for this man."

WAR CRIMES

The Nazis were condemned for their treatment of prisoners of war, who were often executed without trial or placed in camps where they died of starvation and disease.

When the verdict was read out, Göring's face was set in his usual dismissive demeanour. He stood still until the last part of the translation – *"Tod durch den Strang"* ("death by hanging") – reached him through the headphones. Without changing his expression, he took off the headphones, turned on his heel and left the court.

In the following days, he tried to have the sentence changed so that instead of being hanged, he could be shot, which he considered more appropriate for a soldier. The request was flatly refused.

On the evening of 15th October, the prison guards begin secretly preparing the executions. The condemned did not realise that shortly after midnight they would be led to the hastily erected gallows in the prison's gymnasium. At 22.45, a shout was heard from the guard outside Göring's cell. Göring, who had been lying peacefully on his bed until that point, was convulsing. Göring turned blue in the face before taking his final breath. The prison doctor opened his mouth and removed a piece of glass – the remains of a cyanide capsule.

At a press conference the following morning at 06.25 – scheduled so the Allies could announce that the war criminals had been executed – Göring stole the stage for the last time. As the news hit the streets of Nuremberg, a sense of relief and something akin to triumph spread among the Germans.

"Well done, Goering," one said. "He was always one jump ahead." "Typical," said another. "Grabbing centre stage, like the great performer he was."

Even the Göring's US prison psychiatrist described the suicide "a skilful, even brilliant, finishing touch".

In 2005, a former US prison guard admitted he'd been tricked into giving Göring the cyanide by a beautiful German woman who had claimed it contained life-saving medicine. An explanation most historians consider plausible, but impossible to prove.

The secret of what happened to Göring's body is well kept, except he was "cremated and the ashes disposed of". Göring and his accomplices never received their marble sarcophagi. ■

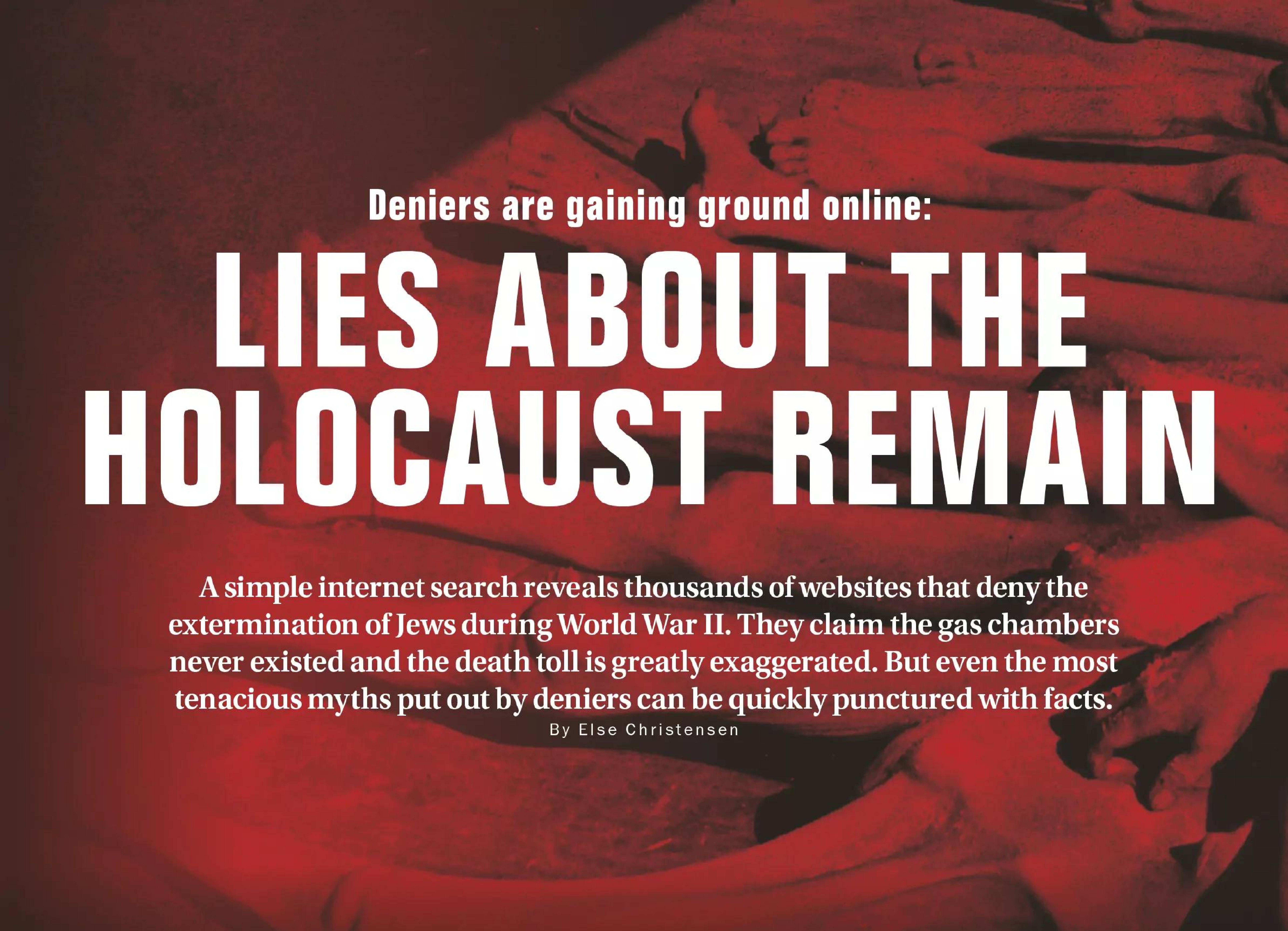
COLD WAR STOOD IN WAY OF JUSTICE

The Nuremberg trials were supposed to be the first in a series of showdowns with Nazi criminals. But after 1946, the emerging rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union put an end to Allied cooperation, and the following trials were held under purely American auspices. There, lower-ranking Nazis were prosecuted on the same charges as the top leadership. In 12 trials, 183 people were tried; 12 were sentenced to death, eight to life imprisonment, and 77 received prison sentences. One trial was held against Nazi doctors who had murdered supposed undesirable groups, including the disabled, and experimented on concentration camp prisoners in the so-called euthanasia programme. Seven of the leading doctors and administrators received death sentences.

The Nuremberg Trials were also followed by a series of local war crime trials, including Israel's trial of Adolf Eichmann, mastermind of the Jewish exterminations, who was sentenced to death in 1962.

Karl Brandt experimented on prisoners and led the euthanasia programme. He was given a death sentence.

POLFOTO/CORBIS



Deniers are gaining ground online:

LIES ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST REMAIN

A simple internet search reveals thousands of websites that deny the extermination of Jews during World War II. They claim the gas chambers never existed and the death toll is greatly exaggerated. But even the most tenacious myths put out by deniers can be quickly punctured with facts.

By Else Christensen

Shortly before his suicide in 1945, Heinrich Himmler stubbornly claimed that Europe's Jews died natural deaths in the concentration camps due to infectious diseases.

Himmler's statement became the foundation upon which the earliest Holocaust deniers built their theories. Frenchman Paul Rassinier, one of the progenitors of denial, claimed in his 1948 book *Crossing the Line* that while some killings and gassings did take place, they were the work of extremists and not Nazi policy. "[N]ever at any moment did the responsible authorities of the Third Reich intend to order – or in fact, order – the extermination of the Jews," Rassinier claimed.

Since Rassinier's book, the conspiracy theories have only grown ever larger. All over the internet, myths abound that attempt to deny the Nazi mass murder took place. These claims may seem convincing, but in fact contradict all scientific and historical fact.

The Holocaust is confirmed by the testimonies of thousands of survivors, the statements of SS guards and, not least, the hundreds of thousands of official documents that the Nazis failed to destroy before the end of the war.

Myth based on outdated facts

One of the most common denial myths is that the basement of the Birkenau crematorium could not have been used as a gas chamber because the doors opened inwards, so could not be opened if the room was filled with dead bodies. Therefore, the argument goes, the gas chambers were in fact just ordinary mortuaries. The problem is that this argument is based on the earliest architectural drawings of Auschwitz-Birkenau's Crematorium II, where an inward-opening door was indeed planned.

However, later construction drawings clearly show that the door was changed to open outwards when the decision to build a gas chamber in the crematorium was made in 1943. Holocaust deniers choose to ignore the many more recent architectural drawings, just as they ignore, for example, the order for gas-tight doors for the crematorium.

Only the most extremist – or gullible – initially paid any attention to Holocaust deniers, but by the mid-1970s, their proponents changed tack. The deniers of this era wrote in an academic style, with footnotes and references to recognised researchers and institutes. Many of them also adorned themselves with academic titles, some – but not all – of which were fake. The evidence now consisted of intricate chemical and technical writings and correlations built on, among other things, false documents – all with the aim of convincing the reader that the extermination of the Jews had never happened.

With the rise of the internet, deniers have been able to propagate their theories on numerous websites – yet even here, they come with the deniers' tell-tale trademark: certain details taken out of context so they appear to clearly support their claims. ■

Thousands died of disease and malnutrition in the concentration camps. But even more were gassed to death.

ULLSTEIN BILD

CLAIM: Zyklon B is an insecticide and not suitable for killing people. If the Nazis really wanted to exterminate the Jews, they would have used a different gas.

TRUTH: The startling fact is that Zyklon B actually works better on humans than on the lice it was originally intended to kill. Humans die within 5-10 minutes of being gassed at a concentration of just 300 ppm (parts per million).

Lice, on the other hand, are cold-blooded animals with a much lower metabolism and only die several hours after being exposed to up to 16,000 ppm. Another advantage of using Zyklon B gas was that it was already being used in the concentration camps and was therefore relatively easy to obtain without raising suspicion.

Zyklon B is frighteningly effective on humans.

AUSCHWITZ MUSEUM

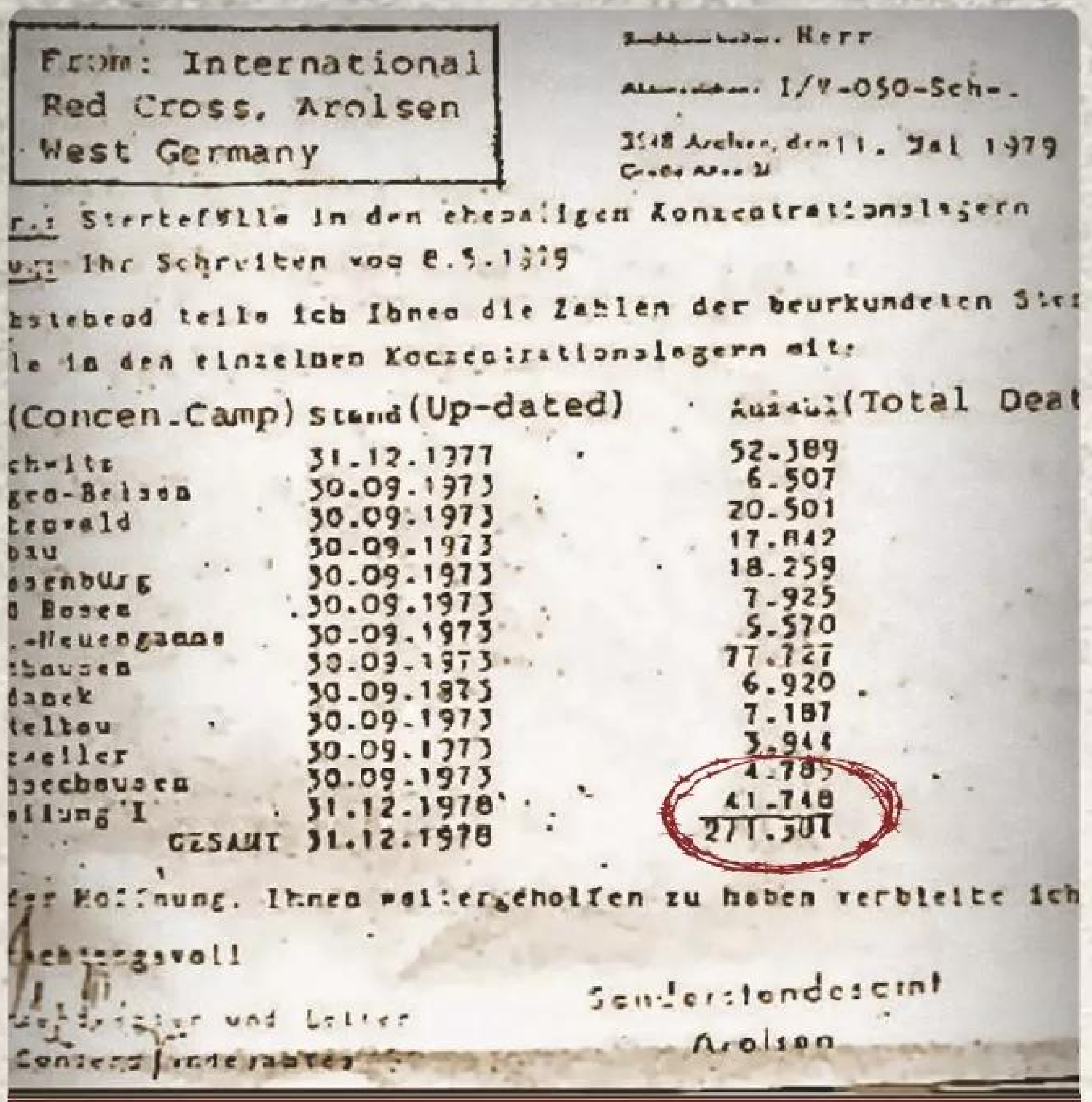
CLAIM: The crematoria were built to burn people who died a natural death – for example, the result of a typhoid outbreak. What some claim to be gas chambers were actually just morgues.

TRUTH: Many concentration camp prisoners died of typhus and other infectious diseases, but nowhere near enough to justify the number of cremation ovens the Nazis installed in places like Auschwitz.

The rooms that deniers claim were just mortuaries could also be heated, which made them totally unsuitable for storing dead bodies. These heating installations ensured that the gas chambers maintained a constant temperature of 26-27 degrees Celsius, at which Zyklon B works most effectively.

CLAIM: The Nazis could not have used Zyklon B gas in the crematorium buildings, because the gas combined with the heat from the ovens would have caused a huge explosion.

TRUTH: While it's true that large amounts of Zyklon B gas in the air combined with the heat from the ovens would have caused a powerful explosion in the crematorium, scientific studies show that the amount of gas required to exterminate people in the gas chambers was around 200 times lower than the amount needed to produce an explosion. So, even if the Nazis had liberally flooded the chambers with Zyklon B for each mass execution they performed, the amount produced would still have been far too small to set off an explosion.



From: International
Red Cross, Arolsen
West Germany

Herr

I/V-050-Sch-.

3548 Arolsen, den 11. Jul 1979

Sterbefälle in den ehemaligen Konzentrationslagern

Ihr Schreiben vom 8.5.1979

stehend teile ich Ihnen die Zahlen der beurkundeten Ste
le in den einzelnen Konzentrationslagern mit:

(Concen.-Camp)	Stand (Up-dated)	Anzahl (Total Deat
chwitz	31.12.1977	52.389
gen-Belsen	30.09.1973	6.507
henwald	30.09.1973	20.601
bau	30.09.1973	17.842
ssenburg	30.09.1973	18.259
Rosen	30.09.1973	7.925
-Neuengamme	30.09.1973	5.570
thausen	30.09.1973	77.727
danek	30.09.1973	6.920
telbau	30.09.1973	7.187
weiler	30.09.1973	3.944
sachsenhausen	30.09.1973	4.785
eilung I	31.12.1978	41.748
GESAMT	31.12.1978	271.301

der Hoffnung, Ihnen weitergeholfen zu haben verbleibe ich

Hochachtungsvoll

Sonderstandesamt
Arolsen

The Red Cross refutes the claim it produced this document used by Holocaust deniers.

CLAIM: The death toll of Jews killed in the Holocaust is greatly exaggerated. At most 200,000-300,000 died – and of natural causes.

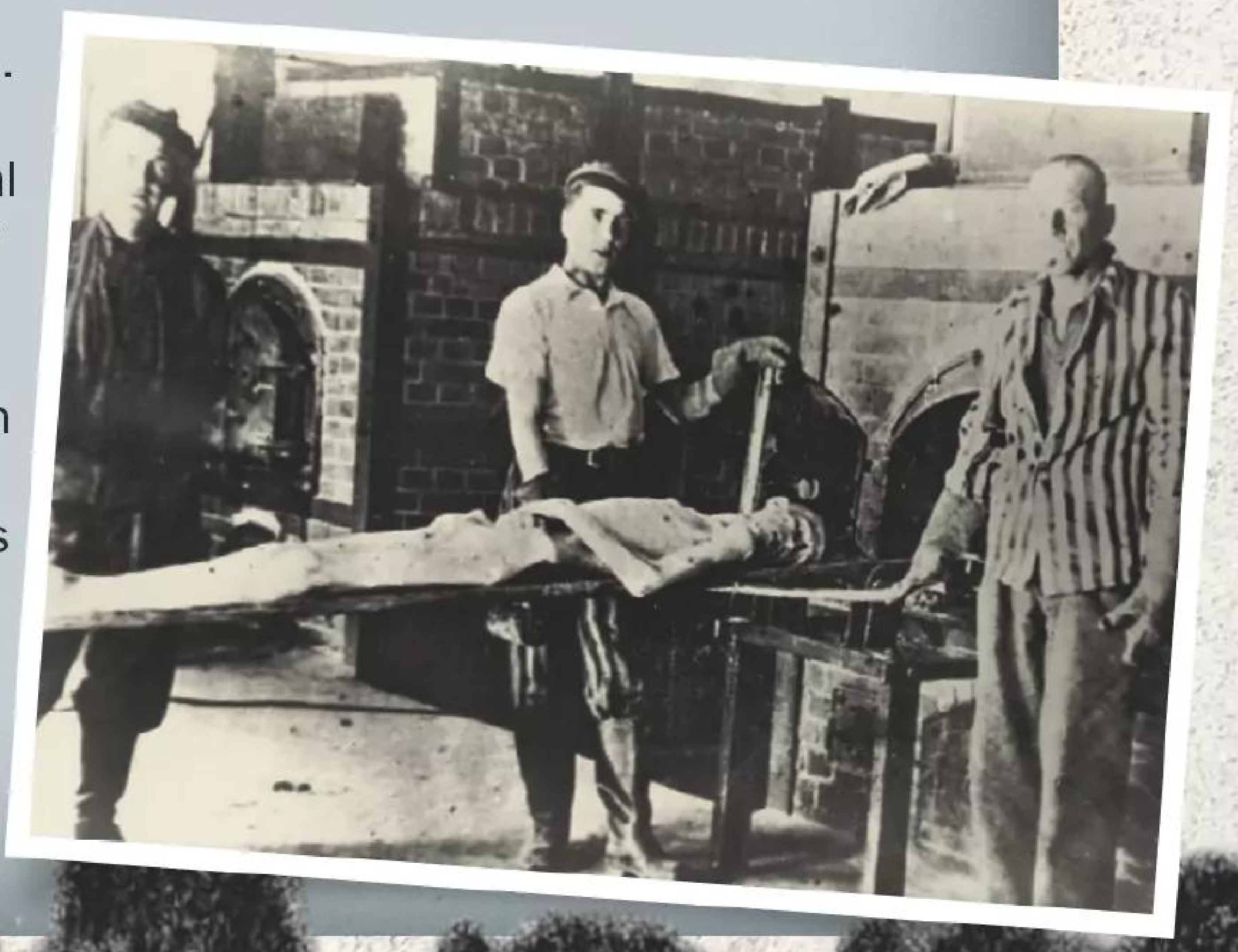
TRUTH: Historians estimate that between five-and-a-half and six million people were murdered in the Holocaust. The myth that 'only' 200,000 perished comes from the book *General Psychologus* written by an unknown author, Alexander Scronn. The name is probably a pseudonym and the book was published in 1965 in Brazil, a country that harboured many German Nazis after the war. Scronn claims to have based his statement on information from the International Red Cross.

Scronn's thesis has been repeatedly and strongly denied by the Red Cross, but that hasn't stopped deniers from claiming Scronn as a witness to the 'truth'.

CLAIM: A single cremation takes an hour, so it would never be possible to burn 1.1 million people in the three to four years that the crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau were in operation.

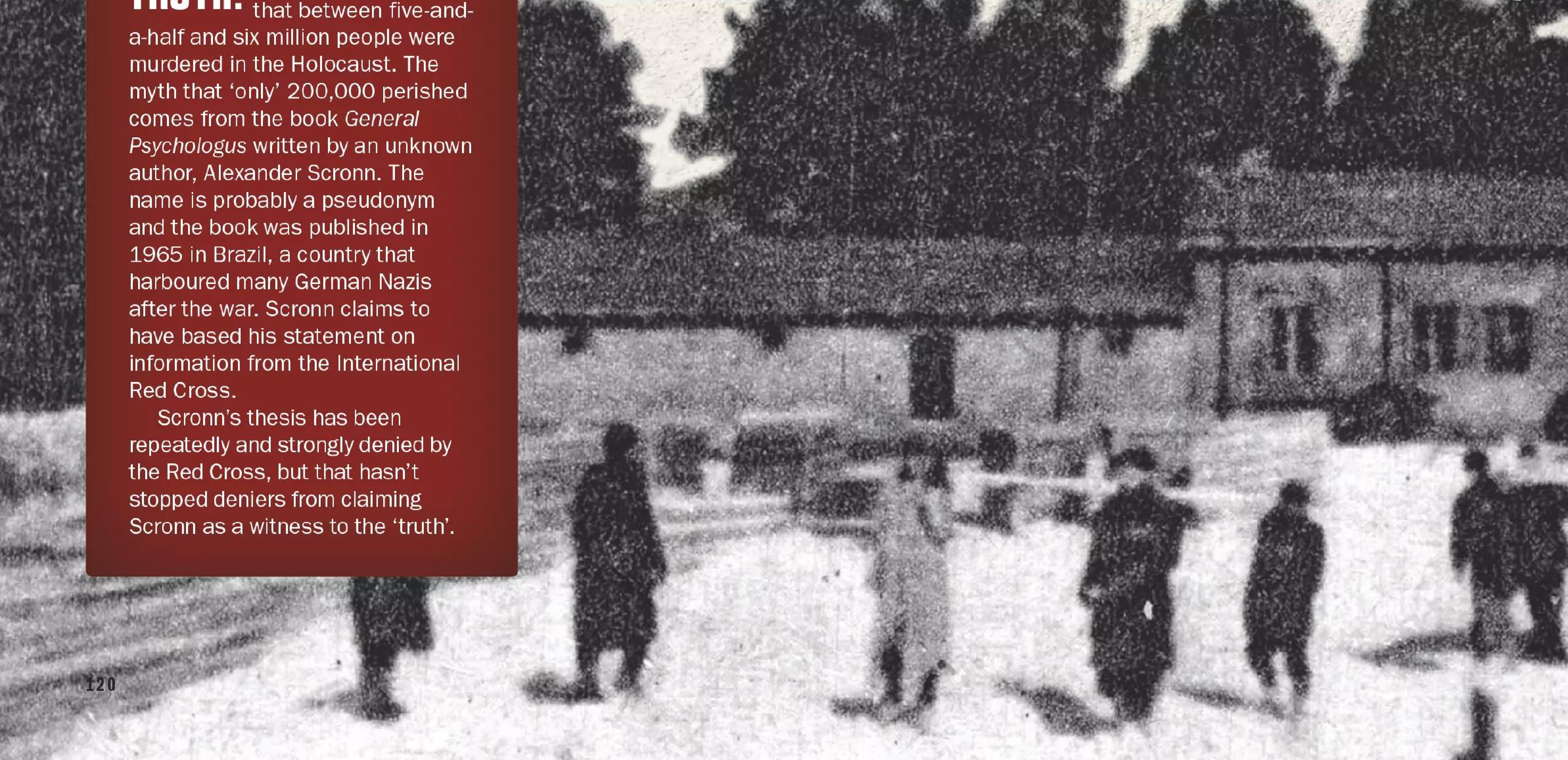
TRUTH: This claim is a classic among deniers, who consistently compare Nazi burning to regular cremation. Here, the aim is to give the bereaved a sand-like ash from their loved one's remains to take home, so the furnace must be shut down between each cremation to prevent mixing the ashes from individual bodies.

Instead, the Nazis used methods that can best be compared to industrial mass burning. If the oven is constantly filled with new bodies, it reaches a much higher average temperature. Furthermore, just under half the time in crematoria today is spent burning the body. As creepy as it sounds, the Nazis were aware of this fact. Therefore, members of the sonderkommando were ordered to pound the torsos of the burning corpses with iron rods. The survivors referred to it as "stirring the corpses", which significantly reduced the cremation time in the ovens.



Reconstruction of the cremation process.

POLFOTO/ULLSTEIN BILD



The Führer insisted on exterminating the Jewish race.

ULLSTEIN BILD

CLAIM: Hitler knew nothing about the Holocaust and extermination was not regime policy.

TRUTH: The claim of Hitler's innocence in the Holocaust has most recently been put forward by the English author David Irving. However, hatred of Jews was the foundation of all Hitler's policies:

"If I am ever really in power, the destruction of the Jews will be my first and most important job," Hitler told journalist Josef Hell as early as 1922. As the war progressed, the shootings and later gassings were closely monitored and controlled by both Hitler and Himmler. The Führer usually gave all his orders verbally to a few people at a time, so there is no written order signed by Hitler. However, Rudolf Höss, commandant of Auschwitz, testified that he was called to a meeting with Himmler in Berlin prior to the exterminations. Himmler told him that:

"The Führer has ordered the Final Solution of the Jewish question. We the SS have to carry out this order. The existing extermination sites in the East are not in a position to carry out these intended operations on a large scale. I have, therefore, chosen Auschwitz for this purpose."

CLAIM: If prisoners had really been gassed with Zyklon B, they would have found clear blue marks from hydrogen cyanide on the bricks. Scientists did not.

TRUTH: Although the theory behind the myth is correct, the statement is wrong for several reasons. Primarily because the concentrations and amount of gas used were far too small, but also because the exposure time was too short.

Normally, the gas remained in the chambers for no longer than 20-30 minutes – nowhere near enough time to form deposits, according to experts. Furthermore, historians know from members of the sonderkommando that both the walls and floors of the gas chambers were thoroughly washed after each execution. The cleaning was necessary because, after use, the chambers were soiled with the victims' excrement, blood and urine.

In 1944, the Nazis blew up the gas chambers when they vacated Auschwitz. The ruins have therefore been partially under water for years – and any gas residue has been diluted to a much higher degree than in the delousing rooms, which deniers often compare them to. Nevertheless, scientific studies have repeatedly confirmed the existence of Zyklon B gas in the ruined walls of the gas chambers.

Despite the fact that the Auschwitz-Birkenau crematoria are immortalised in photographs, some deniers believe they never existed.

BPK/SCALA

HOLOCAUST

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“The Führer has ordered the Final Solution of the Jewish question. We the SS have to carry out this order.”

HEINRICH HIMMLER

On 27th January 1945, the Red Army arrived at Auschwitz. The soldiers couldn’t believe their eyes. Starving and sick prisoners lay abandoned in the cold barracks, and blown-up crematoria bore witness to the unspeakable crimes committed there by the Nazis. 2025 marks the 80th anniversary of the liberation. We commemorate the many victims and take you all the way through history: from the rise of Hitler through Kristallnacht to the largest concentration camps and the most notorious executioners. Read all about Auschwitz, Ravensbrück and Treblinka – and the emotional aftermath of liberation.

HUNGER, FEAR AND SLAVE LABOUR WOULD BREAK THE WOMEN

THE HOLOCAUST’S LARGEST CRIME SCENE

Auschwitz was the largest and most notorious of the Nazi concentration and extermination camps. With Commandant Rudolf Höss at the helm, the camp was transformed into an efficient killing factory. Meanwhile, a few brave souls tried to report on the horrors from the depths of hell.

Teen rebel in hiding:

ANNE FRANK TOLD HER DIARY EVERYTHING

In 1942, the Nazi persecution of Jews forced Anne Frank’s family to go into hiding. But the march of Nazi boots in the streets was far from the most pressing problem in teenage Anne’s world. That honour was reserved for her mother.

History

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